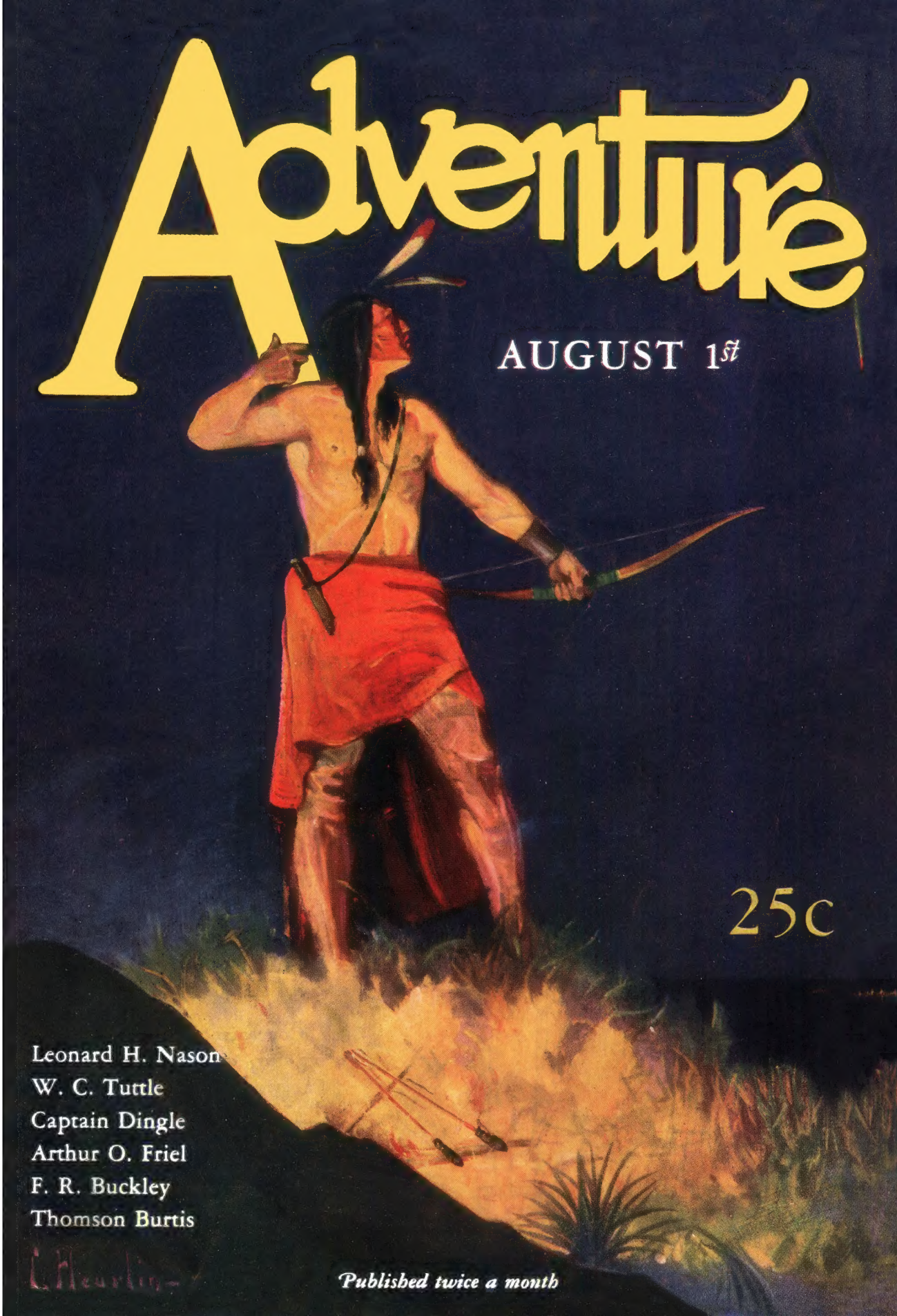
AUGUST 1st ISSUE, 1927
VOL. LXIII No. 4

ADVENTURE

25 Cents

Adventure

AUGUST 1st



25c

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Arthur O. Friel
F. R. Buckley
Thomson Burtis

Published twice a month

$250.00 Prize Contest

(Closes Aug 31, 1927)

Can You Tell Me?—

What Use

1. *Do tourists have for Sterno?*
2. *Do mothers have for Sterno?*
3. *Do doctors have for Sterno?*
4. *Do students at college or school have for Sterno?*

FORTY such questions to test what you know and try your power to think. Answer them correctly and become better acquainted with this inexpensive "friend-in-need" for a hundred walks of life. Ask your dealer for a contest blank, or write to us for one. Get your friends to help you answer the questions. Win one of the following prizes:

1st prize $100.00 2nd prize $50.00

3rd prize $25.00

and 15 additional prizes of $5.00 each,

given for the most complete set of correct answers mailed to us not later than midnight, August 31, 1927. In case of a tie, each tying contestant will receive the full amount of the prize.

You do not have to buy Sterno Canned Heat or anything else, in order to compete in this contest or to answer the questions. But every home should have the fully equipped Sterno Cook Stove (illustrated above) for its thousand-and-one handy uses. Once know its great convenience, and you'll never be without this strong, substantial cooking and heating outfit. Does 'most anything the kitchen stove will do and lots of things it won't. Worth a hundred times its trifling cost, just for emergencies alone.

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(Two Burner Size—50c.—Heat not Included)

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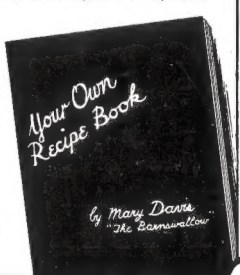
"The Barnswallow's" Cook Book is crammed full of practical menus and recipes for delicious dishes you can make with Sterno Heat and this Sterno Stove. Compiled by Mary Davis from her own experience.

Get Sterno Stove Outfit at dealers everywhere, or from us, for only 25c. For "The Barnswallow's" Cook Book, send the coupon on the package or the labels from three Sterno cans, to

Mary Davis, Domestic Science Department
STERNO CORPORATION
Box 577, 9 East 37th St., New York, N.Y.



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In the Far West
Small Size Canned Heat, 2 for 25c
Large Size Canned Heat, 30c
In Canada
Small Size Canned Heat, 15c
Large Size Canned Heat, 35c.

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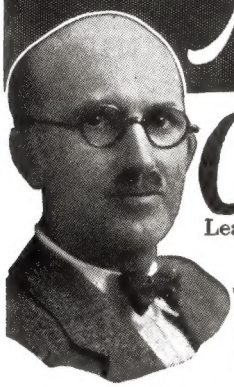

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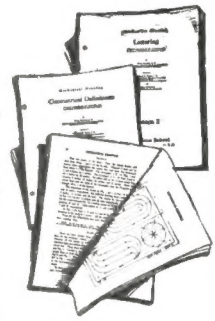

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Tooth Brush

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ADVENTURE
Aug. 1st, 1927

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Brooklyn, New York.

Volume 63
Number 4

"His Tail Between His Legs"

What most men would see if they could see themselves

MOST men are being whipped every day in the battle of life. Many have already reached the stage where they have **THEIR TAILS BETWEEN THEIR LEGS.**

They are afraid of everything and everybody. They live in a constant fear of being deprived of the pitiful existence they are leading. Vaguely they hope for **SOMETHING TO TURN UP** that will make them unafraid, courageous, independent.

While they hope vainly, they drift along, with no definite purpose, no definite plan, nothing ahead of them but old age. The scourgings of life do not help such men. In fact, the more lashes they receive at the hands of fate, the more **COWED** they become.

What becomes of these men? They are the wage slaves. They are the "little-business" slaves, the millions of clerks, storekeepers, bookkeepers, laborers, assistants, secretaries, salesmen. They are the millions who work and sweat and—**MAKE OTHERS RICH AND HAPPY!**

The pity of it is, nothing can **SHAKE THEM** out of their complacency. Nothing can stir them out of the mental rut into which they have sunk.

Their wives, too, quickly lose ambition and become slaves—slaves to their kitchens, slaves to their children, slaves to their husbands—slaves to their homes. And with such examples before them, what hope is there for their children **BUT TO GROW UP INTO SLAVERY.**

Some men, however, after years of cringing, turn on life. They **CHALLENGE** the whipper. They discover, perhaps to their own surprise, that it isn't so difficult as they imagined, **TO SET A HIGH GOAL**—and reach it! Only a few try—it is true—but that makes it easier for those who **DO** try.

The rest quit. They show a yellow streak as broad as their backs. They are through—and in their hearts they know it. Not that they are beyond help, but that they have acknowledged defeat, laid down their arms, stopped using their heads, and have simply said to life, "Now do with me as you will."

What about **YOU?** Are you ready to admit that you are through? Are you content to sit back and wait for something to turn up? Have you shown a yellow streak in **YOUR** Battle of Life? Are you satisfied to keep your wife and children—and yourself—enslaved? **ARE YOU AFRAID OF LIFE?**

Success is a simple thing to acquire when you know its formula. The first ingredient is a grain of **COURAGE.** The second is a dash of **AMBITION.** The third is an ounce of **MENTAL EFFORT.** Mix the whole with your God-given faculties and no power on earth can keep you from your desires, be they what they may.

Most people actually use about **ONE-TENTH** of their brain capacity. It is as if they were deliberately trying to remain twelve years old mentally. They do not profit by the experience they have gained, nor by the experience of others.

You can develop these God-given faculties by yourself—without outside help; or you can do as **SIX HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND** other people have done—study Pelmanism.

Pelmanism is the science of applied psychology, which has swept the world with the force of a religion. It is a fact that more than 650,000 people have become Pelmanists—all over the civilized world—and Pelmanism has awakened powers in them they did not **DREAM** they possessed.

Famous people all over the world advocate Pelmanism, men and women such as these:

T. P. O'Connor, "Father of the House of Commons."
The late Sir H. Rider-Haggard, **Famous novelist.**
Frank P. Walsh, Former Chairman of National War Labor Board.
Jerome K. Jerome, Novelist.
General Sir Robert Baden-Powell, Founder of the Boy Scout Movement.
Judge Ben B. Lindsey, Founder of the Juvenile Court, Denver.
Sir Harry Lauder, Comedian.
W. L. George, Author.
Gen. Sir Frederick Maurice, Director of Military Operations, Imperial General Staff.
Admiral Lord Beresford, G. C. B., G. C. V. O.
Baroness Orczy, Author.
Prince Charles of Sweden.

—and others, of equal prominence, too numerous to mention here.

A remarkable book called "Scientific Mind-Training," has been written about Pelmanism. **IT CAN BE OBTAINED FREE.** Yet thousands of people who read this announcement and who **NEED** this book will not send for it. "It's no use," they will say. "It will do me no good," they will tell themselves. "It's all tommyrot," others will say.

But if they use their **HEADS** they will realize that people cannot be **HELPED** by tommyrot and that there **MUST** be something in Pelmanism, when it has such a record behind it, and when it is endorsed by the kind of people listed above.

If you are made of the stuff that isn't content to remain a slave—if you have taken your last whipping from life,—if you have a spark of **INDEPENDENCE** left in your soul, write for this free book. It tells you what Pelmanism is, **WHAT IT HAS DONE FOR OTHERS,** and what it can do for you.

The first principle of **YOUR** success is to do something radical in your life. You cannot make just an ordinary move, for you will soon again sink into the mire of discouragement. Let Pelmanism help you **FIND YOURSELF.** Mail the coupon below now—now while your resolve to **DO SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF** is strong.

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Write us a letter! Tell us all about yourself, selling experience in detail, your record of tailoring a les, if any, age, references, territory wanted, etc. No writing back and forth—if your application letters looks O. K. will send you line immediately.

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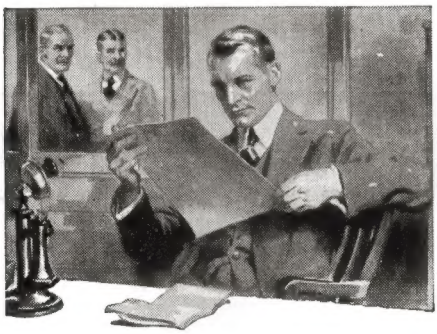

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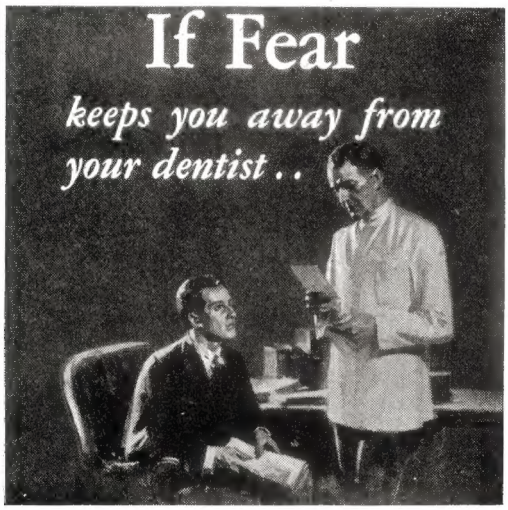

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It firms gums, keeps teeth snowy white and protects them from acids which cause decay.

See your dentist and start using Forhan's, today. Teach your children this priceless health-habit. At all druggists, 35c and 60c.

Formula of R. J. Forhan, D. D. S
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Forhan's *for the gums*

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We Make This Promise

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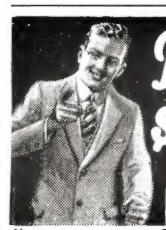

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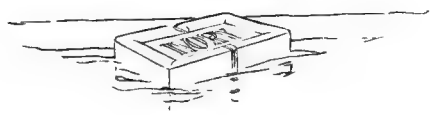

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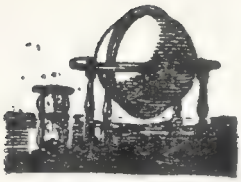

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Joseph Cox
EDITOR

Contents for August 1st

The Rub o' the Saddle . . . . . LEONARD H. NASON 2
A Complete Novelette of the U. S. Cavalry in France

With a Round Turn . . . . . CAPTAIN DINGLE 34
A Story of the Sea

Behold My Friend . . . . . R. E. HAMILTON 48
A Complete Novelette of White Men in China

Medium Boiled . . . . . THOMSON BURTIS 70
A Story of the Border Air Patrol

An Egyptian Lodging . . . . . HARRY A. FRANCK 85

The Devil's Castle . . . . . ARTHUR O. FRIEL 86
A Three-Part Serial of the Orinoco Country. Part I

Bug Eye Loses Hisself . . . . . ALAN LEMAY 110
Letters of a Wandering Partner

The Chains of Africa . . . . . T. SAMSON MILLER 117
A Story of the Jungle Trails

Trophies . . . . . WILLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON 127

Thicker Than Water . . . . . W. C. TUTTLE 128
A Three-Part Serial of the Old West. Conclusion

Death Warrant . . . . . F. R. BUCKLEY 160
A Complete Novelette of Medieval Italy

The Camp-Fire 182
Lost Trails 191
Old Songs That Men Have Sung 191
Ask Adventure 186
Books You Can Believe . . . 191
Trail Ahead 192

Decorations by ROCKWELL KENT

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When a cavalry squadron rides to war

The Rub o' the Saddle

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By LEONARD H. NASON

THE WIND howled and drove the rain in sheets along the hills beyond the Meuse. Leaves spun and twisted and, flying about in the dark, plastered themselves suddenly on the faces of sleepy sentinels. The men beat their breasts, pulled their helmets over their eyes and tried to shelter themselves behind the collars of their slickers. They walked their posts on the edge of the woods and cursed the day that they had ever entered the Army.

Farther in the woods, invisible in the blackness, long lines of horses stamped, kicked at each other, squealed and chewed fodder.

Beyond the horses, here, there and everywhere, the rain dripped on many small squares of canvas, the shelter tents of a squadron of cavalry. The squadron, assembled from all over northern France, from remount, military police, prisoner escort, liaison and orderly duty, had been marched to these woods and bivouacked a week ago. Then every day they had been taken out and drilled, maneuvered and knocked into some kind of ghostly resemblance to a squadron of horse. The purpose of all this was not divulged. The squadron, officers and men, hoped that it meant a fight. They had been too often disappointed, however, to build any great hopes on such a thing.

A bugle suddenly began to shrill through the darkness. The trumpeter made two or three false starts, because he had been hastily roused from his bunk and his trumpet was full of water. At last the call echoed through the trees, the howling of the wind and the sound of the branches rubbing against each

other drowning it entirely at times and giving the wailing notes a very uncanny effect.

In one of the many small tents a man had just removed a branch from beneath his blankets. This branch had been bruising his ribs since he had gone to bed, but he had only now mustered enough resolution to awaken fully and remove the branch. As he lay down again with a sigh, the first notes of the bugle came to his ears. He listened.

"Regimental call!" he muttered. "That's us. Whatever comes next, I can't hear it."

He lay down and buried his head in the blankets.

Again the bugle shrilled and the troop trumpeters, roused by its call, thrust their heads out of their shelter tents and repeated it. The woods rang with the clamor, even above the howling of the wind. The man under the blankets uncovered one ear and listened. It was not usual to hear so much trumpeting at that hour.

"Regimental call, officers' call, trot!" said he. He turned and shook the man next him violently. "Come, 'Swede,' snap out of it!" he yelled. "Officers' call blowing! Come on, get out! Officers' call at three A.M.!"

The other man leaped from his sleep and to his feet in one bound, lifting the tent from its pegs on his shoulders.

"Here!" cried the other man. "Ah, you —— fool! Now you've pulled down the tent and it raining soup and stones. What the —— is the matter with you? Don't you know how to get out of a shelter tent yet? Now how are we going to get dressed with the tent half down?"

"In the presence of the enemy," replied the Swede, "a man should sleep ready to respond instantly to an alarm. Hand me my slicker—I'll drown in another minute. Man, hear those trumpeters! They sound like trumpeters' practise down back of the butts. Come on!"

From the wreckage of the tent shone forth the beam of an electric torch.

"Well, I'm condemned!" said the man under the tent. "Look at the Swede. Do you mean to say you sleep full pack, spurs, gun, map-case and binocks?"

"Sure do," replied the other, fumbling about for his slicker amid a confused mass of tent, blankets and various effects. "Are you coming or am I going alone?"

"Hold up the tent," said the other man. "I'll be ready in a minute. I could be shot for what I think of the whole affair."

He began to curse and to swear, for one of his boots had managed to worm its way into the open during the night and was full of water. The boot was one of the tight-fitting, snappy looking British models, fine for garrison wear, but a little difficult to get on and off when wet. These boots are pulled on to

the foot and leg by means of steel hooks inserted in concealed cloth loops sewed to the boot leg. One of these loops broke under the stress of a frantic tug and the officer under the tent spoke a few short words, very apt and to the point.

"Come, Mr. Canfield," urged the Swede, "I'm waiting patiently, but I'm going alone if you don't come out of there *priesa*."

"I can't get my boot on," cried the other desperately. "Well, I'll go with it half on. It will be easier to get off when I come back."

"You'd better put it on," advised the Swede. "I think the Germans have begun a drive and we're to be thrown into the breach to stop 'em. Officers' call isn't blown in the middle of the night for fun!"

"It isn't!" scoffed Mr. Canfield.

A short interlude of profanity indicated that he could not find his Sam Browne. The sagging tent stirred and rustled, and Mr. Canfield appeared, waving his arms in air as he put on his slicker.

"It isn't for fun!" he continued. "Swede, when you have been with the squadron a little longer, you'll know the commander better. We'll go into headquarters and there he'll be with his watch in his fist and a little pad of paper, checking off the time it took us to answer the call. When we're all there he'll make a few remarks about promptness in answering calls, no matter at what hour, and then dismiss us. The last man in will get some dirty detail to take charge of tomorrow. That's what he calls training. He thinks he's making us snap out of it!"

"I don't believe it," said the Swede. "I tell you we're going to die a hero's death. Fritz has started a drive."

"Well, let's go see," said the other.

The two started off through the wet woods, Mr. Canfield limping because one boot was but half on.

These two officers were friends of long standing, lieutenants of cavalry both. Mr. Canfield had stayed with his troop doing remount duty, while the Swede had gone away to some French cavalry school. On graduation the Swede had been commissioned a first lieutenant, while the other still remained a second. Hence the Swede always addressed his friend as Mr. Canfield, to show that he, the Swede, did not forget for an instant that the other was but a second lieutenant; and Mr. Canfield invariably addressed his friend as Swede, to show that he, Mr. Canfield, did not care in the slightest what rank either of them held.

The Swede was not one, by the way, but had been cursed with curly blond hair, light blue eyes and shining teeth, and to show the contempt in which curly hair and blue eyes are held by the majority of men he had been so christened. He was short and stubby of stature, with round fat legs that might adequately grace any billiard table, as Mr. Canfield frequently told him.

A pyramidal tent served as squadron headquarters. The two officers pulled aside the flap and entered. About half the officers of the squadron were there, standing around the fire in that state of misery that comes of being dragged from bed in the early hours of a wet morning.

The squadron commander, a thin, gray-haired man, stood beside a table, and as Mr. Canfield predicted, he held a watch in one hand and a notebook in the other. As the two officers entered, he glanced at the watch and then, laying it on the table, made a mark in the book. Mr. Canfield called the Swede's attention to this act with a gentle nudge.

One by one the other officers came in, and when the last had entered and tried to hide himself behind a group of other officers, the major put down his book and watch and picked up a sheet of paper.

"Gentlemen," he began, "I don't want any demonstration or excitement. It has been common knowledge for some time that an American field army was being formed, with the obvious intention of making an advance into enemy territory. This advance is to begin in two

hours. I have just received orders to move forward in readiness to take up the pursuit when the enemy retreats."

The major then read the order, which stated, in the usual stiff terms, that on the D day at the Y hour, the bombardment would commence and that at H hour the infantry would begin an advance. The first squadron, 19th Cavalry, would advance at H-plus-one to a position in readiness on the line Haudonville-Bois Brule-Bois de Rupt, there to await the orders of the army commander.

"That," continued the major, "is the substance of the order. A copy goes to each troop commander. I want to impress upon you officers that from now on we stop training and put our training into practise. I don't know what our final mission will be, but I imagine it will be that of maintaining contact with the retiring enemy forces. We aren't strong enough to hasten the pursuit. It's to be regretted the army has no more cavalry at their disposal than these three troops. Now then, the unattached officers will be disposed of as follows."

A list was read and the Swede found himself attached to B troop. Mr. Canfield was squadron intelligence officer.

"Reveille at four-thirty, he said, didn't he?" observed the Swede, as he and Mr. Canfield cautiously picked their way among the tents on their way back to their own. "Half an hour more. Maybe you can get your boot on all the way by then. So I'm to go with 'B.' Now you won't have the benefit of the superior knowledge I gained at school. What kind of a bird is my C.O.?"

"He's too fat for a cavalryman," said Mr. Canfield. "Don't try any of your theories on him. He's nervous for a fat man."

"I'm sorry we can't be together," said the Swede. "Too bad you won't be able to see my strokes of genius. Now what are you doing?"

They had arrived at their tent and Mr. Canfield was fumbling about in the dark.

"I'm going to fix the tent," said he, "and then I'm going to crawl in and have a half-hour's sleep. When you've been at the front as long as I have you'll sleep every minute you have free."

"Ha-ha!" laughed the Swede scornfully. "Well, go to sleep if you can. I'm too excited. Here I've been in France since the very first troops came over and never got a look at a German outside of a labor squad. The prospect of a fight excites me. And a mounted fight, think of that!"

"You won't get it with this outfit," said Canfield, pounding stakes with his pistol butt. "I know the Old Man too well. The sergeant major was with him in Mexico. It appears he doesn't like to lose man or horse, and so the prospects of action look slim. These aluminum tent pegs aren't worth —— room. The minute they hit a rock they bend."

"Listen to something cheering, Intelligence," said the Swede. "Can you see a glimmer of light? I can. I deduce that some ambitious cook has a fire in his chow-gun over there. Drop monkeying with that tent and let's go buscar a hand-out. Once reveille goes we'll be too busy."

"Good," said the other, and the two went off through the woods to the welcome warmth of a chow-gun, its lid hissing with rain.

A few minutes later first call blew and the chilled trumpeters, their lips stiff with cold, made weird noises on their instruments reminiscent of "sound off," "march" and "assembly."

The woods awoke to teeming life. First sergeants could be heard receiving reports, the horses began to stamp and whicker at the approach of the stable guard with grain bags, men tripped over tent ropes and swore terribly.

The rain ceased shortly after reveille and bits of blue sky appeared by the time the horses had been fed, saddles packed and breakfast prepared. The cooks had kept a store of wood in the ovens of the rolling kitchens for just such emergencies as preparing hot breakfasts on rainy mornings, so that the men were fed with boiling coffee and hot

bacon. They ate and smoked and listened from time to time to a dull growling in the east, where the battle had begun, and where the infantry were now going forward at the H hour.

After breakfast the men saddled up and there was the usual amount of bucking, swearing and kicking on the part of the horses, and unrestrained language on the part of the men. Most of them had put in a wet night and were in no mood for any frivolity displayed by the mounts.

The Swede, having but arrived the afternoon previous, had not yet been assigned a horse. There was a remuda or extra horse detachment of eight, small enough for a troop, but nowhere near the proper size for a squadron about to go into action. The Swede had condemned them all with a sweep of his hand. At this minute the stable sergeant of B troop appeared and, rapping his spurs, saluted.

"Sir," said he, "if the lieutenant would like a good horse, he can ride mine and I'll ride on the wagon."

"Thank you," said the Swede, "but first let's have a look at the horse. I don't believe in the motto about never looking a gift horse in the mouth. Especially in the cavalry."

The horse in question was a short-coupled chestnut mare, more a pony than an officer's charger. The Swede, however, was short and he thought with comfort that he would not need a ladder to mount that horse.

"Just take her off the line and let the lieutenant look at her, will you, Desaw?"

One man who might be the stable orderly here untied the mare's halter shank. At once she snorted wildly and, rolling a white eye, backed very vigorously several yards, the stable orderly clinging to the headstall and vainly trying to get a foothold.

"Where the —— are yuh goin'?" cried a trooper as the mare tramped on his saddle with her hind feet. He swept his rifle from the gun boot and applied the boot to her hind quarters with a resounding slap.

"If you was saddled up like you ought to be you wouldn't get your saddle walked on," cried a sergeant.

The mare, having leaped her length from the impact of the gun boot, twisted her head about to see what had happened. Again she jerked her head in air, backed, and made a swing with a hind foot that rolled her late antagonist in the mud of the picket line.

"She's a little fresh, isn't she?" remarked the Swede, looking at the chestnut mare with every evidence of distaste.

"Oh no, sir," said the stable sergeant, "she's gentle as a kitten. There ain't a cleverer horse in the A.E.F! Why, General Pershin' would grab that mare in a minute if he ever set eye on her. That Desaw there, he looked her in the eye an' excited her. You shouldn't never look a horse in the eye. There now, sir, she's quiet now."

The mare was indeed standing quietly, but she looked all about her with her white eye and suddenly shot out a snake-like head and neck to seize a mouthful of flesh from an innocent soldier who was passing.

This one leaped aside, collided with a man who was saddling up, knocking the saddle into the mud and, shoving the horse against its neighbor who, having nerves as well as the men, promptly retaliated with two sledge-hammer kicks. The troop horses, all standing side by side at the picket line, received the effect of this commotion like ten-pins passing on a stimulus to their fellows. There was a chorus of squeals, the thud of saddlebags and packs colliding, and the thump of kicks.

"Whoa!" cried the men. "Yah, what the —— is the matter with you? Behave now!"

"Humm!" said the Swede.

The men were all regarding him with interest. He was a new officer; this was the troop that he must accompany and help lead into battle, and a bad impression now would ruin him. If he turned

down the horse the men would think he was "yellow." An older officer would have put a flea into the stable sergeant's ear and stalked away, but the Swede was not an old officer.

"Put my saddle on her," said the Swede. "I like 'em lively."

There was a long whistle from the first sergeant.

"Lead 'em out on the road!" he bellowed. "Column o' fours!"

The stable sergeant and orderly stayed behind to saddle the Swede's mare—in the confusion he had as yet no striker—but strangely enough the mare made no further resistance. The packed saddle was put on her, the saber hung, curb chain adjusted, and the Swede, a lump in his throat, mounted.

"There, sir," cried the stable sergeant, "didn't I say she was a kitten?"

The Swede made no reply but applied the spur and moved out to take his place at the head of the first platoon. He noted that the mare seemed as if she were full of snakes, and that she moved out to the road with a sidewise motion that no jabbing of the spur could affect.

On the road the Swede halted his steed well away from any companions and observed the squadron assembling. There were but three troops, but they were well up to strength and fully equipped—saber, rifle and pistol. The packs were small and tightly rolled. There were no auxiliary troops.

"Would you object to riding over here, Lieutenant?" asked a cold voice.

The Swede would not object and took up his position on the road at the head of his platoon, and the man who had spoken, his troop commander, gave the signal to mount. The men mounted with a clatter and the squadron moved out. It was apparent to the Swede that his troop commander did not like him. This might have been due to the fact that the Swede was wearing a uniform that had cost him one hundred dollars in gold at a Paris tailor's. If it were not for his insignia, one would think the Swede a corps commander, at least.

"Come up here, Lieutenant," said the captain suddenly, turning around and motioning with his hand. The Swede caressed his horse with the spurs and moved up beside the captain. "What experience have you had?" continued the captain. "I'd like to know before I entrust you with a mission."

The Swede modestly mentioned his qualifications and stated that he had just finished a course at the school of cavalry and had been for a month at the depot of Tenth French *Chasseurs à Cheval.*

"You feel competent to command a platoon during our present mission?" asked the captain.

"Yes, sir," said the Swede, "but I am a little hazy as to the exact mission we are to fulfill. I did not join until yesterday afternoon."

"It was all very carefully explained," said the captain, "some days ago. The army mission was outlined and our particular part in it. The general and specific orders were read and discussed and each officer told the part he was to play."

"Would you mind repeating some of it to me?" asked the Swede humbly.

"Well, I was officer of the day that day and didn't attend the conference," replied the captain, "so I didn't hear any of it."

"But isn't there a drive on?" asked the Swede. "What's the objective of the drive?"

"I don't know now," said the captain. "They're just driving."

The squadron here came out on the main road and the Swede's horse, alarmed by the roaring of a motorcycle that went by under her nose, bolted into the next field. The Swede got her under control and managed to bring her back to the road.

"You want to give the signal 'disregard' when you go for a ride like that," said the captain sarcastically, "otherwise you'll have the platoon following you all over the lot."

"Yes, sir," said the Swede.

The road became rapidly crowded,

mostly with motor traffic. Huge American trucks loaded with ammunition, smaller blue French ones, empty ambulances going up to dressing stations, touring cars belonging to various unit commanders, and in and out of all this confusion curved motorcycle despatch riders tearing along at breakneck speed.

The squadron moved across the fields until they reached the Meuse. Here there was a long wait until they could cross the bridge, and when they finally got over and began to climb the heights on the east bank, it was well toward afternoon. They turned into some woods, dismounted and fed the horses.

There was no water there, but the squadron commander had wisely had the horses water while they waited to cross the Meuse. Here the growling sound of the battle was not noticed and nothing but the rattling of trucks on the road and the boom of airplanes broke the stillness.

Mr. Canfield hunted up the Swede and found that young officer sitting gingerly on the roof of an old dugout.

"What's the matter, Swede?" asked Mr. Canfield.

"My horse had been giving me a ride all day," said the other. "Have some hash? No? Well, I don't blame you. Listen. You ride with the staff—what's the news?"

"No news," said Canfield. "The attack came off on schedule time and the last report we had was that the resistance had been very slight."

"What are we supposed to be doing?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said Mr. Canfield. "We don't know, not even the Old Man. We've got orders to come here, to this Bois de Rupt, and wait. About twenty minutes ago we got the order to advance to Mouilly. You're a strategist—what would you guess we were going to do? I'll offer the suggestion that we're going to escort prisoners of war."

"Haven't seen one all day," said the Swede.

"Well, on this front no one advanced," said Canfield. "The advance was all to the southeast. We're doing some watchful waiting. When it's over we'll go home."

"I fear as much," said the Swede, "but some one has a fine opportunity here. I think the high command is waiting for a break through, and it's our job to turn the retreat into a rout. When the retreat begins we can go after them and raise ——, charge into 'em, cut up their columns, burn their wagon trains, make marmalade out of 'em."

"With three hundred men?" laughed the other.

"It's enough. A small body of men with determined officers can raise a powerful lot of ——. This is fierce hash," exclaimed the Swede. He flung the can from him. "Too much pepper in it. I'm not enjoying myself. No food, a fool horse that rubs me raw and a command that has less march discipline than a volunteer fire brigade."

"Before I forget," said Mr. Canfield, "inasmuch as I am an intelligence officer, I've been detailed to take a patrol and go for a look-see. Do you want to come?"

"What are you going to patrol for?"

"There's an American division in front of us doing nothing. There's a French division next them and, since we are to spend the night here or rather at Mouilly, the Old Man wants to be sure there's no gap between the French and Americans, and I guess he wants to find out what it's all about. Well, do you want to come?"

"When do we start?"

"When it gets dark."

"Good," said the Swede. "Maybe I can work some of the oats out of my horse."

The Swede got up very stiffly and hunted around until he found his troop commander, from whom he requested permission to accompany the patrol. The captain gave it to him grudgingly enough and the Swede thereupon went about his preparations. He unloaded his pack and saddlebag—the officer's saddle has but one—but retained his saber and pommel pockets.

The mare regarded these preparations suspiciously. The squadron had loosened cinches during the halt, but had not unsaddled. The Swede, having no striker and hence taking care of his own horse, had not loosened his cinch. It is a difficult matter to cinch a restless horse, for cinching often makes the mildest steed kick and reach for the arm of the cincher with his teeth. The Swede considered that the mare deserved no consideration after her treatment of him during the day.

"Hey, Swede!" called some one loudly. "Oh, Swede! Where are you?" Mr. Canfield was searching the woods, calling loudly.

"What the —— do you mean by yelling for me like that?" cried the Swede. "Do you think I want the whole squadron calling me Swede? I've a —— good mind to have you tried for that! You're only a scurvy second lieutenant, anyway!"

"Oh, the squadron will like you all the better if you have a nickname. And if you have me tried I won't let you go on my party tonight."

"To —— with your party! I think it's a false alarm, anyway."

" 'Tisn't," said Mr. Canfield. "Get your old goat and come over to the P.C. We are going to get our instructions. Officers' patrol of four men and us."

The P.C. of the squadron was an ancient dugout; in it sat the squadron commander.

"Gentlemen," he began, when the two officers stood before him, "our information is that the advance has favorably progressed. We are to hold ourselves in readiness for an immediate departure. I believe that we will be used as an exploring patrol to determine the extent of the enemy's withdrawal. The troops on our front have not advanced, but from the general situation, it will be to the east that our work will be done.

"Now then, I want this patrol to reconnoiter the road Mouilly-St. Remy-Combres. You'll go up a hill after you leave Mouilly, and the minute resistance is encountered, you will return. I don't want any men or horses put out of action in this affair. St. Remy is probably still occupied. Find out if it is or not. You ought to be able to tell from the ridge. Pay strong attention to the state of the roads and see if you can get an idea of how much wire there is at the foot of that ridge.

"And remember, I don't want any foolishness. You're not a combat patrol. Rejoin the squadron on the crossroads 42-3, 51-6. It's where the road from St. Remy crosses the Grand Tranches de Calonne. We'll be in the woods a little way toward Mouilly, but I'll have a man at the crossroads for you. If you've got any questions, ask them, and if you haven't, be on your way."

The two officers saluted, went out of the dugout and mounted.

"Wait, now," said the Swede, "before you take up the trot, I want to fix my map. I've a good mind to stay at home because the major said we weren't to fire a shot."

"He didn't say any such thing. He said, 'No folly!' That means no charging of concrete pill-boxes with six men. Come on, never mind your map; I know the road."

THEY moved out, took up the road to Rupt and then swung north and south again toward Mouilly. It was dark and there was little traffic on the road. They soon found they were in a French area, for the rolling kitchens, the ambulances and the occasional fourgons, or ration wagons, they passed were all French.

The Swede's horse still pranced and curvetted. They had tried to adopt a patrol formation, with one man acting as a point, but the chestnut mare would not stand for having a lone horse in front of her, and did nothing but stretch her neck, jump up and down, rush sidewise and try to bolt.

"I'm going to have an interesting night," remarked the Swede, shoving himself back into the saddle from between

the mare's ears after a particularly violent buck. "I'm through to the bone now from today's ride. Wouldn't you think the —— would get tired?"

"Stay with her," comforted Mr. Canfield. "You and I will act as point and maybe she'll be quieter if she doesn't see any one in front of her."

The private was sent back and the two officers took his place in advance of the patrol. They wormed their way through the mass of ruins that had once been the town of Mouilly and mounted the hill to the crest of the ridge called the Côtes de Meuse. This had been the front line for four years.

At the summit they drew rein. Below them the ground dropped away suddenly to the plain of the Woevre, the wide tableland that stretches from the heights of the Meuse about Verdun clear to the Moselle. The night was moonless but clear, and as far as the eye could see there were twinkling points of flame, scattered here and there on the plain.

"What's that?" asked the Swede. "Don't tell me those are camp-fires there."

"The Boche burning their supplies," said Mr. Canfield. "In front of us they still hold, apparently. The attack was delivered this morning from the south, that is, off to the right, from beyond Saint Mihiel. We'll have to move much farther south to do any good in aiding the advance, because the objective of the shove is a line about ten miles south of here. Well, let's go back."

"Let's go back!" cried the Swede, and the chestnut mare stood straight up in the air at his cry, "why, what the —— did we come out here for—a ride? I know lots of pleasanter rides than one through a lot of ruined towns and roads full of shell-holes. You don't think you're going back now! Why what in the name of all that's greasy have we accomplished?"

"Our mission was to reconnoiter the roads. The roads are full of shell-holes, but passable for cavalry. That's enough for me. As to Saint Remy, the Old Man is a little off there. It's some distance behind the Boche lines."

"He said to see if it was occupied," objected the Swede. "According to my idea we can go down this road and if we get shot at we'll know the town is occupied. How do we know there wasn't an attack here today? It's quiet enough."

"The French have shelled the —— out of the woods," said Canfield, "but they weren't going to attack. They're just holding things down on the flank of one of our divisions."

The Swede gathered his reins, and Canfield heard the slap of the other's spurs in the chestnut's ribs. The chestnut refused to budge.

"Where you going?" cried Canfield.

"I'm going down this road until I get shot at," said the Swede.

Thud-thud! went his spurs. The mare moved, but sidewise. She circled like a crab and returned to her place. The Swede drew his saber.

"By ——, she'll go or I'll kill her!" he cried.

Slap! went the saber. This time the mare went down the road.

"You fool!" cried Canfield, "the front line is about a hundred yards away. I'm not going to lead this patrol any further!"

"Stay there and wait for me then."

The Swede heard Canfield say something about pistols, he heard the slapping of holsters and then, as he urged his horse forward, the scrape of hoofs on stone as the patrol followed him.

They began very shortly to descend the hill. All trace of the road soon disappeared, but the chalk subsoil, churned by the shells, gave out a kind of light, so that they could pick their way through a place like a ravine. There had been woods here once, but they were shattered skeletons of trees now, and the wind rattled them against each other so that they sounded like the bones of a man on a gibbet. The illusion was the more vivid because of the smell of dead things.

This was an old sector; the French had lost frightfully here earlier in the

war. It was dark in that ravine, and cold. The Swede began to feel a chill about the heart. Suppose his horse balked in front of a machine-gun? The mare, however, hearing the other horses behind her, moved forward more willingly.

"*Halte là!*" said a voice under the Swede's nose.

A dark form had risen from the ground, but the Swede could see by the shape of the helmet and the long slender bayonet that the stranger was French.

"Americain," said the Swede, leaning from the saddle. The mare danced excitedly. "Boche?" he inquired.

"*Partis,*" said the Frenchman. "*Ils ont levé le camp, les salauds! Attention là!*"

The Boche, the Frenchman said, had beaten it. He cried, "Look out!" as the mare went careering down into what had once been the old front line and out the other side. The Swede spoke his mind and hammered the chestnut with his spurs.

It was black as the inside of a man's hat in there, the Swede was nervous himself and had no enjoyment in battling with a crazy horse. He heard the muttering of Mr. Canfield speaking to the French sentry and then the scrambling of the horses in and out of the old trench.

The Swede took a little firmer grip on his saber and urged the mare forward. She went willingly, which was a sure sign that other horses were following. They went in and out of shell-holes, splashing in the water and sliding in the paste that the shells had churned the wet chalk into. That sector had been well hammered, and recently.

Suddenly the chestnut topped a slight rise and there before them, black against the starry sky, was the wreck, the skeleton, of a dead town. A wall here, ragged and broken; there a doorway that went nowhere; beyond, the semblance of a house, its windows like the eye-sockets of a skull. There was a sort of ghostly order in these houses, and the Swede, drawing nearer, could see that they were lined along both sides of what had been a street. Of the road that had entered that street he could see no trace.

The mare went up and down over the battered ground with a motion like that of a rocking horse. The Swede clutched his saber and tried to listen. The place was so quiet. This was no kind of front line; there should be machine-guns going, wire entanglements, rockets, snipers, shells bursting. Instead, there was black night, silence and the fearful bones of this town, with its windows through which one could see the stars and its doors that framed dim pictures of shattered walls beyond.

The mare entered the town and the houses seemed to crowd down to the street to see this spectacle of a cavalryman in their midst. This must be the town the squadron commander had meant them to reconnoiter, thought the Swede. Well, if so, he had done it well and thoroughly. There were no Boche there, that was certain. The Swede would go down to the last ruins in the street and then turn and get out of there as rapidly as possible.

Suddenly the mare halted.

"I suppose boob Canfield and his gang have stopped and the dumb mare won't go on until they do," thought the Swede.

He felt the mare give a slight shudder and he patted her neck. Then quietly he touched her ears. They were pointed straight forward. She had heard something that the Swede, though he strained until his eardrums seemed to crack, could get no hint of. The mare began to tremble violently, and the Swede could feel her muscles tensing for a rear and a swing, then a wild bolt down the dark street. He leaned well over her neck to keep her from rearing and plied his spurs with a will.

Then a dark figure seemed to take shape from the darkness, an animal of some kind, for it was on all fours. The animal straightened and made a dash for the Swede. The mare shook her head violently, plunged, reared, striking out with her forefeet, and then swung about

to bolt. The Swede, however, still managed to keep her under control.

"Who the —— are you?" he cried. "French or German?" He cut at a dark shape with his saber. "If you haven't got any better sense than to jump a man like this I don't give a —— what you are!"

A man seized the Swede's leg, but the Swede thrust his saber and his leg came clear. There was a sudden barking of pistols at the far end of the street where the patrol was and Canfield's voice crying, "Swede! Swede!"

"Beat it!" roared the Swede, "the place is full of Boche!"

The mare, frantic with terror, refused to bolt, refused to do anything but rear and plunge while the Swede slashed at the dark shapes that came running toward him. Some times his saber met resistance and some times air. The horse twisted and turned so that the rider had no idea how many men were opposed to him. They merged into each other, separated, multiplied, disappeared entirely and then took shape again as do the shadows in a running stream. The Swede began to feel dizzy from the wild motion of the horse. A sudden thunder of hoofs, of pistols, barked in his ear.

"Come, Swede," said a voice, and the mare was thundering down the street.

They rushed headlong into the dark, shell-torn country, regardless of wire, regardless of trenches. The Swede realized at once that he could not hope to guide the mare in the maelstrom of shell-holes and battered trenches, so he gave her a loose rein, lay low in the saddle and prepared to leap clear if she fell into a trench or became snarled in wire.

About him he could hear the others. They had all evidently turned their horses loose and were taking their chance of broken necks together. They scampered wildly for what seemed a long time, yet it was hardly more than a minute, when there was a thud, the sound of scrambling and a man's voice calling for help. The Swede immediately tried to pull up, but it took him some time and, when he had finally gotten the chestnut under some kind of control, he could hear Canfield yelling:

"Rally, men, rally! There's a man down the trench!"

The Swede turned his horse's head toward the source of sound and from the fact that the mare made no objections to going he guessed that the others must all be there. He found, after all, that he had not overrun the others very much, for he soon discovered them, a black clump, from which came excited whispers.

"Are you all right, Kelly?" the Swede could hear Mr. Canfield ask.

"Yes, sir, but the *cabello* is in the trench and how we can get him out I don't know."

"Come on, men, all give a hand; maybe we can lift him a little."

There was an angry hiss from behind them, ending in a loud *plop!* The scene was at once brightly illumined. The Swede saw the group before him, all dismounted and looking into a trench. As the light shone forth they immediately lay down.

"Get up out of that!" yelled the Swede. "Get the horse out of the trench while you can see what you're doing! Here! He's on his feet; lead him along to a place where he can get out!"

"Lie down!" cried Mr. Canfield. "That flare was sent up so they could see to make hash out of us with a machine-gun!"

"To —— with the hash!" cried the Swede. "Get that horse out of the trench!"

The Swede did not remember crossing that trench in the dark. It was quite deep and strong, he noticed. He dismounted and, leading the sniffing chestnut along the parapet, found that the horse in the trench was on its feet, that it was apparently unhurt and that the other members of the patrol still hugged the ground. There were two lights in the air now.

"Gimme that bridle!" muttered the Swede.

He reached out, seized the bridle and began to tow the horse along the bottom of the trench. The mare followed on the parapet, still sniffing and inclined to move sidewise at the extremity of the reins. The Swede cursed her feelingly. A machine-gun fired a burst and then subsided.

The Swede decided to keep on, figuring that if he were going to be killed he might as well get it on his feet as lying in the mud, and as long as he was moving he was drawing nearer and nearer to safety. The horses would betray the position of the patrol, anyway, unless they abandoned them, which would put an immediate end to the patrol's usefulness.

"Now who the —— is this?" cried the Swede.

The mare snorted and tried to rush away, pulling the Swede after her, so that he was spread-eagled, arms stretched widely, one hand grasping the bridle of each horse, and thus unable to draw his pistol. There was a group of men in front of him, sheltering themselves in a depression of the ground.

The Swede raged at the two horses and at the men lying on the ground, and his language was such as cavalrymen use in moments of stress. It smoked like burning oil. The men approached, and the mare continued to back, nearly tearing the Swede's arm from the socket. Then he saw that the newcomers were French.

"*Nom de nom!*" cried the Swede, "give me a hand with this pig of a horse! Who's putting up those lights?"

"We are," said the French. "We heard the racket. What do you make so much noise for?"

"Never mind conversing!" cried the Swede in English. "Help me get this horse out and give those boobs over there a kick or two, and let's get out of here."

"*Peu de calme* " said one of the French. "Say it in French; we don't understand English."

The Swede choked and let go the bridle of the horse in the trench. Then he pulled the mare up to him, hand over hand, so that he could get hold of her headstall and could have better control over her. The lights went out and all was dark once more.

"Canfield," he cried, "come over here! The French put up those lights. Get the —— off your stomach and lend a hand here!"

"Who's shooting the gun?" called the other.

"Who's shooting the gun?" repeated the Swede to the French.

"Us," said they. "There are Boche patrols in the town."

"I'll say!" agreed the Swede. "Come over here! It's all right."

Simultaneously with the arrival of the others there was a great sound of grunting and scrambling. In a few seconds several French appeared leading the horse that had fallen into the trench. The Swede felt the horse over, rubbed his legs, and pronounced him fit to be ridden.

"He's skinned his hooks, that's all. Now, then, how do we get out of here? I'm lost."

It appeared after some conversation with the French that they thought there was an old road behind them. These French said they were members of the colonial division that had made a short advance to protect the flank of the Americans in the morning, and they now were holding themselves in readiness to beat off counter-attacks. The cavalrymen were in what had been the old Boche support positions and the French did not know their way around any better than the Americans.

"Well, we'll lead out," decided the Swede, "and take a frog for guide and have them shoot us a light from time to time and so get back. That is, we'll hope we will."

They started off, leading the horses, but found that they had involved themselves in a sort of maze that, like a fish-trap, was easy to get into but hard to get out of. The French obligingly fired lights from time to time, but these showed nothing but little hills and valleys

like a city dump, straggling wire and the white shell-holes.

At times the men ran headlong into the stumps and trunks of long dead trees, at other times they followed snaky trenches that went from nowhere into unexplorable blackness. These trenches they could cross, either because they would come to a place where the parapet had been beaten down by shells or else the trench passed through a concrete shelter, over whose roof they could lead their horses.

The mare, as many nervous horses will, behaved beautifully as long as no one was on her back. She followed like a lamb, sniffing and blowing down the Swede's neck every time he halted to look about him.

It grew cold and the men could smell daylight coming. The sector began to stir, and to the north, where another American division waited watchfully, machine-guns began to pound.

Finally, when the men were at their last gasp, and the two officers had seriously considered abandoning the horses, they struck a belt of shattered woods which the French soldiers with them said followed the road. A minute later they struck a French sentry and behind him a platoon of infantry coming in. The Swede conversed with the officer of the platoon and then turned cheerfully to the others.

"Come on," said he, "all's well with the world. These men have just come up the road from Troyon and he says it crosses the highroad about two hundred yards south of here."

Five minutes later the patrol came out on a highroad which Canfield, consulting his compass, found ran almost north and south.

"This is it," said he. "There's not another road runs in this direction this side of the Meuse. This is the Tranches. God knows where we are on it. Let's think. We must have worked south, because we were in old German territory, whereas if we had worked north we would have struck Les Éparges and the ravine there. Also, there's more wood around there. So if we move north now, we'll come to our crossroads. The Old Man will be crazy, we've been out so long."

"First," said the Swede, "let me do something!"

They heard him make a vigorous movement and then some distance off there was a faint *clunk!*

"What's that?" cried Canfield.

"I've fired away that —— tin hat," said the Swede. "It may do for a doughboy, but for a mounted man, no. It pounded my head on that gallop till I thought it would crack my skull. Now that's done I'll sheathe my saber and we'll go."

"You haven't been carrying your saber in your hand, have you?" cried the other.

"Well, I unsheathed it to beat the horse with," said the Swede, "and then after that scrap I didn't want to sheathe it up until I saw if there was blood on it. I think I rammed it into a guy in the town. Lately I fear it's broken. I've been using it as a cane and it seemed rather short."

They inspected the saber in the light of Canfield's flashlight and discovered that it was indeed broken about a foot from the point. The cavalry saber, model 1913, is a straight, thin blade, modeled after the English weapon, and it breaks like glass.

"I can't find any gore on it," said the Swede sadly.

"Maybe it got rubbed off by the mud," spoke up one of the men.

"That's so indeed," said the Swede, and with this grain of comfort he sheathed the saber and mounted. "I think we'd better move with a little caution," he continued, gathering the reins. "If there are Boche patrols running loose they may very well get as far as this road. I think there's a gap in the lines here, anyway."

"What do you suppose we ran into in the town?" asked Canfield.

"Patrol out to see if the French held it. The frog told me that the Boche

had retreated to the foot of the second ridge and that patrols of the French were out trying to locate the new Boche line. Also, there would be Boche out to see how far the French had advanced. I think they're both scared to death of each other."

"What were you doing prancing around in the town there?" asked Canfield. "You sounded like a recruit trying to mount."

"I was cutting at 'em and trying to keep myself from being thrown at the same time and I had my hands full, I'm not kidding."

"They were sneaking around to grab you when you retreated and they ran into us," said Canfield. "Anyway, we had a scrap. I got a chance to use my automatic. I'm for it from now on. I hit a guy in the back with it at a distance of a yard and he couldn't have taken more flops if he'd been hit by a train. By ——, he spun around for a while! Well, is the town occupied or not?"

"That's the question," said the Swede. "We kept on until we secured contact anyway. It was poorly done though, after all. We hauled out before we'd learned the number of our antagonists, whether they were a patrol, a point or drifters left behind in the retreat and trying to work back to their lines. If I had had time to think I would have given the order to stay and fight it out, but a man gets rattled. I can lay it to the mare. If she'd behaved I could have kept my wits."

"Listen," said Canfield, "my front line experience is just as limited as yours, except that I have hung around many a headquarters during minor parties. And I've learned this—that you don't want to go by the book in this war. There's one great objective in all encounters—that's to get out with a whole skin. Suppose we'd stuck around in that town, found out all we ought to have found out and got ourselves killed. What good would our information be?"

"True," said the Swede, "I forgot we weren't a combat patrol. Well, now I'll make a suggestion. We've been going all day and we're liable to go all day tomorrow. It won't do us any good to chase down this dark road for several miles and then to turn around and chase back again with the squadron. Unsaddle and sleep, say I. If the squadron advances we meet 'em here. If they retreat, no harm done."

"Your horse seems to be fresh enough," remarked Mr. Canfield.

"Well, I'm not," said the Swede. "There are parts of me that are sore. I yearn to lie down on my face."

"The Old Man will arouse ——," objected the other. "He told us to go back to the crossroads. And I'm in command."

"Well, I'm rankest man," said the Swede firmly, "even if I am only a guest. To the woods, ho!"

They turned off the road without further comment, ordered the men to unsaddle, set a running guard that would be relieved every thirty minutes and lay down on some old duckboards to sleep. The officers left orders to be called in an hour, and it seemed that he had but closed his eyes when the Swede felt Canfield pulling his shoulder. The Swede got up, stretched himself and shoved his map-case into place. It was still dark, but the night had a grayness in it, and there was a thick fog that rolled in streamers among the trees.

"I taste trouble," said the Swede. "This presages a hot day. I wonder where we water. Well, what's the move? You're in command here and I but obey, provided I agree with your judgment."

"Let's wait until daylight, or another half hour at least, and then get back to the crossroads," suggested Canfield.

"Listen!" said the Swede.

He paused with a cigaret in one uplifted hand and a match in the other. There were many tiny sounds in the air, the stamping of horses, the snoring of men, the far-away growl of heavy guns and the dripping of the condensed fog from the branches of the trees.

"I can't hear anything special," said Canfield.

"I could swear I hear troops on the road," said the Swede, lighting his cigaret. "Where's your sentry?"

"He's on the road. If he'd heard anything he'd have been back here by now."

"Fog's a funny thing," said the Swede. "Makes you hear noises all over the lot and you can't tell where they come from. I used to notice it when I was shooting ducks. You could hear 'em quacking everywhere. Where are you going?"

"I'm getting nervous," said Canfield, getting to his feet. "Let's have the men saddle up. I bet you the Boche rush us within the half hour."

"Here comes your sentry," remarked the Swede calmly, "and me with a broken saber."

"There's troops comin' down the road," gasped the sentry. "I can hear 'em!"

"Which direction?" asked Canfield.

The sentry pointed to the north.

"Saddle up!" said Canfield. "Swede, let's you and I get these men up, let 'em saddle the horses and we'll have a sneak out to the road while they're doing it."

The sentry and the two officers aroused the other three and then, while the horses were being saddled, went cautiously out to the road. It was much lighter now, the fog was a dirty gray, but vision was impossible for more than a few yards. On the road, however, the two officers could plainly hear a steady shuffling and the tiny clinks given by pieces of metal equipment striking together. It was impossible to tell how far away the source of the sound was, but they could easily tell that it was drawing nearer.

"I'll bet you a bottle of red ink it's the Boche making a raid in the fog," said Mr. Canfield. "We'll report 'em and get a medal."

"Report 'em to who?"

"Well, we can hunt up some one that will be interested."

"I'll bet you a bottle of red ink that this noise is the squadron," said the Swede. "That noise is made by horse. Infantry have a noise of their own."

"I hope it's the Boche," said Canfield quickly. "The Old Man will break a blood vessel because I didn't report back at the crossroads. I know him. I'm glad they can't see—"

He went no farther. Two black shapes appeared through the fog and as they came nearer the officers could see that the others were horsemen, riding at a walk with drawn rifles. The shape of the helmets showed that the newcomers were Americans.

"Point of the advance guard," said the Swede. "The Old Man is military after all. Step out, Mr. Canfield, and tell 'em who you are."

Mr. Canfield stepped out into the road and held both hands over his head. The point halted abruptly.

"It's the lieutenant," one of the horsemen said. "The major give orders to be on the lookout for signs o' the patrol," he added to Mr. Canfield.

"All right," said Mr. Canfield. "Move out. Don't delay the advance of the main body. I'll see the squadron commander when he goes by. Where is he? With the main body?"

"Yes, sir."

The point thumped their spurs against the ribs of their horses and went down the road. The advance guard, two squads, followed, accompanied by an officer who put his tongue in his cheek and nodded gloomily as he saw the two officers.

"Bring out the horses," called Canfield. The patrol came out to the edge of the road, just as the bulk of the leading troop appeared, at their head the spare figure of the squadron commander, with the squadron gas, telephone and liaison officers beside him, and the troop commander in the background. He drew rein as his eye lighted on the two officers and the patrol behind them.

"Ah!" said the squadron commander. "I'm glad we've found you. What's your report?"

"Sir," said Mr. Canfield, "the road to St. Remy is passable for cavalry, what is left of it. The enemy appear to have withdrawn. We were fired at from St.

Remy and withdrew. It's our opinion that we were fired on by a German reconnoitering patrol."

The major during this recital had been looking at the horses of the patrol and at the Swede, who was modestly trying to efface himself behind the chestnut, under pretext of fixing his stirrups.

"Have you been running those horses?" asked the major coldly.

"Well, sir," began Mr. Canfield, "we got into a little brush—"

"Brush——!" roared the major. "You look as if you'd been running a steeple chase. Look at those horses!"

Mr. Canfield looked. The horses of the patrol were plastered with mud to the saddle blankets. The Swede had a long gash in his expensive boots from a bit of barbed wire, the men were covered with white from the mud in which they had slept, and the matted hair of the horses' necks and haunches showed that they had been ridden to a lather, which in drying had left their hides streaky. Mr. Canfield swallowed several times.

"What do you mean by running those horses that way?" said the major angrily. "I send you out on a simple mission and find you the next morning somewhere in the woods with your horses barely able to walk. You ought to realize that the horse is the cavalryman's reason for being and he's not to be galloped and exhausted. We've got to depend on our horses to get us to the fight. And look at yours! Mount up! You men rejoin the troop! The two officers ride with me."

"The enemy," began the major, when the march had started again, "have everywhere been forced back. A division of ours is driving north and another eastward, to effect a junction and cut off the retiring troops. This squadron is to proceed down this road, pass the advancing infantry and destroy the railroad at Vigneulles."

The two officers gasped. A squadron of cavalry is rather a small command to rush in where divisions are attacking.

"It's not an impossible task," said the major, "because the fog will conceal us, and once the town has been seized it will be a comparatively easy task to hold it until the arrival of the infantry. We have a weak advance guard, but once we cross the front line we'll make other dispositions. Rejoin your troop, Lieutenant."

The Swede had nothing to do to rejoin but to rein up the chestnut for a few seconds until the troop commander of B, which was the leading troop, came up. The chestnut objected vigorously, but the Swede backed her into the ditch and up against a tree and by that time the troop had arrived.

"What did you find last night?" asked the troop commander, as the Swede reported to him.

"Not much, sir. We rode around in some shell-holes and had a horse fall down a trench and some one shot at us. Otherwise nothing."

"You've been abusing the mare," said the captain coldly. "In this outfit we don't run horses the way you do at school. This is a common sense organization. I don't want you to do it again. If an enlisted man came back from a mission with a horse in that condition I'd have him tried."

The Swede made no remark.

"The old idea of cavalry," went on the captain, "has been done away with. We believe now that cavalry's value lies in its mobility. We use the horse to transport us where the infantry can not go in trucks and then we dismount and fight on foot as infantry. This does away with a lot of galloping and running and foolish gallery plays on the part of young officers. What are you groaning about—are you ill?"

"No, sir," said the Swede, "I'm a little sore. The mare is quite vigorous and I'm beginning to rub through in places. Suppose the fog lifts and we find ourselves in the middle of the German army? Do we dismount then?"

"It's our purpose to get into the town before the fog rises," said the captain. "That's why we were selected for the duty. Any infantry outfit can march

down a road in a fog to make a surprize attack, but the fog would lift—as it surely will in an hour or so—and reveal them to the enemy, but we on our horses can make much faster time. That's a perfect illustration of the modern value of cavalry."

"I wonder we burdened ourselves with sabers," said the Swede.

"They are useful to hold up one end of the shelter tent," said the captain, "and can also be used to advantage in severing barbed wire. I'm giving you this lecture because we'll have to reinforce the advance guard very shortly and you as senior officer will command it. I remain with the troop, that is, the remaining platoon. And I want to firmly impress on you, in accordance with the major's instructions, that this is sober, serious business; this is war, and not a maneuver in front of a gallery of feminine spectators."

The Swede rode in gloomy silence until the major turned in his saddle and halted the squadron.

"Two platoons of B troop form advance guard," directed the major. "We'll have a five minute halt for you to make your dispositions."

The Swede took the second platoon and what was left of the first, which had furnished the present advance guard, and trotted down the road. He replied with a stern look to Mr. Canfield's wink as he passed that officer.

They halted in the cold fog and the Swede gave his orders through chattering teeth. One platoon, under the former commander of the advance guard, he designated as reserve; the other was to form the support, and four sets of fours, or sixteen men, were to be the advance party. Distances were short, due to the fog, and the connecting files, or individual troopers between the various parts of the advance guard, were told to be especially alert for signals from front or rear.

"I will be with the advance party," concluded the Swede, "and in case of a scrap starting, all units close up on the advance party. It's up to us to clear the way for the main body or to disclose the enemy's strength and the only way to do it is by a vigorous advance."

There was a low chorus of orders from the main body, out of sight in the mist, and the Swede looked at his watch.

"That must be the warning," said he. "They'll mount in another minute. Every one jump off and look his horse and equipment over. Any questions?"

"The major was very particular to point out that we were on no occasion to get any horses shot up," said the other officer.

"I suppose if a man gets his horse killed he'll find it on the payroll," remarked the Swede.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprized," replied the other officer.

"Forward!" called the connecting file.

"Advance party, trot, ho!" commanded the Swede, and when he had gained his distance down the road, they pulled to a walk and sent a set of fours ahead as a point. "Now then," said the Swede, "bring on your war."

The advance party regulated its march on the main body, trotting when the squadron trotted and walking when the squadron walked. The men could see on either side of the road rows of trees, but beyond all was lost in the fog. The march was being pressed as rapidly as possible.

The Swede kept his eye on the woods, counting the number in depth of trees he could see in the forest so that he could have some idea of how the fog was acting. It was thin in places, and each time they went by one of those thin spots the Swede's heart contracted.

He had always been taught to believe that cavalry that dismounted was half licked the instant they set foot to ground. Especially was it fatal for the advance guard to dismount; it immediately put the men on the defensive, destroyed whatever aggressiveness they might have, left the advance guard open to attack in flank or rear and exposed their lead horses to death or capture.

The Swede noticed that the fog was

really lifting. He could see now some distance into the woods on either hand. They went by a collection of rustic houses that gave the impression of an amusement park, but which were probably German officers' quarters, their inmates sleeping peacefully.

The fog rolled back again and the Swede felt more secure. He reasoned that the high command must have good dope on the situation and that they would not send a body of men on such a mission unless there was some chance of success.

The road showed no sign of conflict. They passed a German wagon in the ditch, but wagons are likely to break an axle anywhere. The strain and the excitement of the coming engagement began to take effect on the men. They muttered among themselves, telling each other how many krauts they were going to dispose of.

The Swede watched the fog. It maddened him. If it only held they had a good chance of success, but if it rose suddenly and revealed them they were dead men. There were trees along the road and trees do not assist horsemen to attack or retreat. They passed a pile of wooden boxes, evidently German rockets, bearing the name of a Turkish manufacturer. The mare, which had been behaving decently for some time, shied at the white boxes and carried the Swede across the ditch and banged his leg against a tree before he could control her.

A narrow gage track emerged from the woods and followed the road. Suppose a train full of Boche appeared on that road? They began to pass German signs. They must be well within the German lines by now, and the town could not be far off. Yet they had not seen the slightest sign of the American infantry they were to pass through and had not heard a single voice other than their own. Suppose the infantry had been lost in the fog? Suppose they had not even left their positions and this squadron was going out alone to do battle with the whole German Army?

The sun began to shine dimly through the fog. If only something would start, it would not be so bad, but the strain of riding, riding, riding down this fog-shrouded road, through the center of the German army, was becoming unbearable.

They were moving at a fast trot, now; the Swede tried to listen above the rattle of sabers, the *slap-slap* of gun boot against calf, and the *thud-thud* of the trotting hoofs, but it was impossible. There was no sound save the myriad tiny noises of a body of horse on the march.

Suddenly they passed a house and over the door was a sign in German, "*Stichgeb 27.*" They passed another similar house across the road, then two more, then four or five all close together, the doors closed and the windows shuttered.

The fog was getting thinner every minute, and they could see the round ball of the sun quite clearly now over the tops of the trees. The Swede could see more houses now, a field and a wall on the far side. There were men moving there. The fog began to go away as if some one were pulling away sheet after sheet of it and each minute one could see more clearly.

The point suddenly came to a halt and one of the men raised his rifle above his head for the signal, "Enemy in small number."

"Good ——! Don't halt now!" cried the Swede. "Gallop, ho-o-o-o-o!"

He drew his saber and waved it over his head. The advance party and the support of the advance guard did likewise, and all surged forward at the gallop. The Swede reasoned that if they came into the town energetically, with determination to ride down any one who opposed them, their chances would be better for success than if they came creeping in at a walk, ready to turn tail and fly at the first hostile shot. They tore down the road, passed house after house, swung around a curve as if on a race-track, and then down a main street lined with small shops. The Swede saw the point come to a plunging halt.

"Ride 'em down!" he roared. "Don't stop! Saber the —— out of 'em!"

The mare, running with the bit in her teeth, tore down the road and into the square of the town. There was a line of men there and the Swede went for them. Then he, too, tried to pull up, but he went half-way across the square before he could. The men in line looked at him with wonder. The Swede looked at them.

There was a black square wagon out of which came smoke, and after a time the Swede realized that this was a rolling kitchen. He looked long and soberly at the men, but there could be no mistake. The men were Yanks; they were in their shirts and they were lined up with mess-kits for a meal. From the houses round about more Yanks looked down.

Had they hit the wrong town? No, for these houses all bore the customary signs. *Soldaten Heim, Kommandanture, Zum Sanitats Understand.* Behind him the Swede heard the clatter and the rattle of the squadron entering the square. He wanted to sneak down a side street, but it was too late.

Well, nothing to do but to report to the Old Man. The Swede turned the mare down the far side of the square. There was a dead German lying half in and half out of a doorway there and the mare, seeing the body, spun about like a top, so that the Swede, who had been sitting loosely in the saddle, was flung to the ground.

There was in this tiny square a shop, an *épicerie*, to judge from the faded sign over the door. This *épicerie*, however, had been converted to other uses by the German soldiery and had been used as a dispensary of liquid refreshment. The hurried retreat of the Germans had left the place intact with its stock in trade.

It had been promptly seized by the headquarters mess of the infantry, and when the cavalry arrived the officers thereof were invited to partake. Thither, then, they led the Swede. Bumpers of stone were filled from the keg, and when the Swede had quaffed two or three in silence, he recovered sufficiently to groan aloud.

"You sure you aren't hit?" asked one of the infantry officers seriously.

"No, I'm not hit!" replied the Swede. He added other words unnecessary and profane.

"No kidding," said the infantryman, "when I saw you fly out of that saddle I thought there was a Boche in the house that had shot you."

The Swede looked with unseeing eyes across the square and down the street where the squadron, still saddled but with loosened cinches, waited the return of the major from the infantry headquarters.

"What the —— are you doughboys doing in this town?" asked the Swede. "We had orders to come and capture it and here we find a mess-line in the main street and you birds walking around in caps."

"Well, you see," said the infantryman, "we were out in those woods last night and we decided we'd rather sleep under a roof, so we just came in here and took the town without saying a word to any one."

The Swede made no reply. Through the open door came the sound of happy voices, of men calling to each other to "come and have a look at this," of the rattle and bang of a piano. Suddenly came strains of martial music. There was a band playing somewhere, a military band, and a good one.

"That's a keen band," said one of the infantry. "We captured them in the town hall. They were all asleep and we woke 'em up and told 'em to put on a concert. They belong to the Royal Brandenburger Kings Very Own Lager-Lappers. The bandmaster told me so himself."

Here Mr. Canfield entered and, having been led to the bar, was refreshed. He announced to the company that the cavalry would have breakfast in the town and would at an hour to be announced by radio, proceed on its mission—that of maintaining contact with the enemy withdrawal.

"Come away, Swede," said Mr. Canfield, taking the other by the arm. "I've

got something for your private ear."

He led the Swede without and then to a doorstep, where they sat down.

"I brought you out so that you wouldn't get drunk in there," went on Mr. Canfield. "The Old Man would break you if he caught you drunk."

"You can't get drunk on that stuff," said the Swede. "A man could drink until his back teeth were afloat and never get as much kick out of it as he would from a mosquito's hind leg."

"Well, don't take it to heart, anyway. How would we know the scurvy doughboys would break in and capture the town for us? Come away. We've got a hot breakfast ready, cooked by German cooks for German officers. They're going to give the officers our bully and hardtack and we're going to eat their breakfast for them. Come on, it'll put heart into you."

"It wasn't so much coming into the town at the charge and finding a bunch of doughboys eating breakfast instead of bloodthirsty Huns," said the Swede sadly, "but while I was trying to gather what few brains I have the mare slung me. Right in front of the doughboy mess-line. And over came two big mud-thumping captains and asked me if I was hurt."

"Well, we all get policed once in a while," comforted Mr. Canfield. "I must tell the adjutant to make a note of it, though."

"What for?" cried the Swede angrily.

"Why, he that is policed buys each and every officer of the squadron a drink the next time we land in rest billets."

"True," said the Swede. "Well, let's eat. My cake has turned to dough and if a shell happened my way I'd run right under it."

As they went toward the house where breakfast was served the Swede noticed that the town had not the appearance of one recently taken by storm. The band still played, soldiers regaled with captured beer, sang at the top of their lungs; others ate hot food from their mess-kits, food that had been prepared for German consumption. Some announced that they preferred it to their own.

From time to time stern M. P.'s went by, leading bewildered German truck-drivers, orderlies, officers and what-not, who, coming to the town on some mission or other, had been disagreeably surprized to find themselves in the heart of an American division. Rumors were current that the German army had collapsed and that the war was over.

For once souvenirs were a drug on the market. A storehouse had been discovered that contained cases of German belts, knapsacks, all articles of uniform and equipment, and swords, field-glasses, rifles and pistols without number. The soldiers trod them under foot like the stones of the street. What good would a pair of field-glasses do a man? He could not sell them—every one in the company had a set or two or three, and Luger pistols were the same. German spiked helmets were to be had for the picking.

The Swede had his breakfast, and after the meal was summoned to the major's presence.

"There's nothing to be so downcast about," began the major. "We're all a little disappointed that the infantry spoiled our party for us, but I want to point out one or two slight errors connected with the leading of the advance guard. I say slight, but they are really serious. It appears that you charged into the town with drawn sabers. That's no way to do, and you know it. Cavalry don't charge anything any more, much less towns. If you had, upon approaching the first houses, dismounted your advance party, left the horses with the support and gone into the town cautiously on foot, you would have discovered that the infantry had already taken it.

"It seems that they made a night march, seeing, as we did, the opportunity for a bold stroke, and took the town almost without a shot being fired. The fact that you surged into the square waving your sword and were subsequently thrown in front of an American

mess-line has been the subject of a lot of unmilitary levity on the part of the infantry, even those officers whose rank would seem to indicate their having minds above such folly."

The major bit his lips. He had been the subject of some very refined kidding on the part of the commanding general of the infantry and it rankled in his bosom.

"Well, don't do it again. You'll ride with the troop the rest of the day. We're to go forward in half an hour to secure contact with the enemy and discover the extent of his withdrawal. But I'm going to see that we have an officer with the advance guard who is a little less imbued with the saber-waving, hard-riding, cut-and-thrust spirit. A circus is one thing and a war is another. And when you've been through as many campaigns as I have, you'll realize it."

The Swede walked slowly down the street rolling a cigaret. He looked idly at the horses of the squadron switching their tails and being watered by a bucket brigade. Canfield came hurrying after him and took him by the arm.

"I'm supposed to be getting an account of the advance this morning for my intelligence report," said he. "The Old Man says the doughboys are a dirty bunch of hounds. Forget it now and cheer up."

"Oh, I've forgotten all about that," said the Swede, "but I don't look forward with any glee to taking a troop and riding around and around like the first act of Carmen. Ever see Carmen? Well, in the first act a mob go round and round and let out a blatt every once in a while. That's all this squadron is doing. 'You should have been dismounted and gone into the town on foot,' he said. I suppose he figured I'd see the doughboys' footprints. He's sore because I didn't pick up traces of the infantry on the road."

"No, he isn't," said Canfield. "The infantry were in here before the squadron left Mouilly. We're going forward again and we ought to get into some kind of fun before it's over."

"Who the —— wants fun?" cried the Swede. "If the Old Man hears a shot fired he'll dismount all and send the horses to the rear so they won't get hurt."

"Forget it," said Canfield. "The Old Man is an experienced soldier. If you had your way we'd all have sore tails one day and sore feet the next from walking. You wouldn't have a horse on its feet in the whole squadron."

"By ——," said the Swede, "I see a friend!"

A man was going down the line of horses—they were unsaddled now—carrying a bucket of water and carbolic in one hand, and a bottle of iodine in the other. This man was the stable sergeant who had recommended the mare to the Swede; he was inspecting for sore or swelled backs, wire cuts and minor abrasions. He had come in with the wagons which, following the squadron at a safe distance, had recently arrived and were parked close at hand in some one's garden.

"Sergeant," said the Swede.

The sergeant turned and, seeing the Swede, at once put on a look of simple innocence that nearly made the Swede laugh in spite of himself.

"I just thought I'd mention," said the Swede, when he could speak without smiling, "that the troop commander is liable to be hit, and I will then be in command. When that happens I know a man who will scrub pans the rest of his days in the Army, I don't care if he lives to be a hundred."

"Yes, sir," said the stable sergeant.

His face was quite blank as he watched the Swede rejoin Mr. Canfield and the two go down the street.

"I feel better now," said the Swede. "Really the worst part of it was getting policed. And I've put a bug in that fresh stable sergeant's ear that will bother him for a while."

THE SQUADRON took up the march shortly afterward, following a winding road that led to the plain below. The town was the last one on the heights, and

from its eastern exit a wide panorama of the Woeuvre plain could be seen, clear across to the heights of the Moselle. Off to the right the Swede could make out with his glasses the encampments of the American troops, row after row of neat shelter-tents. This on a battlefield!

Of Germans there was no sign. They had vanished into that wide prairie dotted with trees and little clumps of houses that stretched away out of sight northward. And the squadron was to follow them until it gained contact—that is, was fired upon.

"Then," muttered the Swede, "we'll turn around and march home again."

The mare, at the sound of his voice, tossed her head and made a few sidelong steps. The Swede was about to slam the spurs into her ribs, but decided not to. She might take him clear through the troop. The Swede, for the better chastening of his galloping spirit, had been detailed to ride in rear of the troop and see that there was no straggling. He ate dust, cursed, and tried to ease the pain of his saddle sores by standing in the stirrups.

The squadron progressed in a manner that would have delighted the heart of General Parker, who first inoculated the cavalry with the mounted infantryman bug. Whoever was in command of the advance guard dismounted his men at every crossroads, sent forward dismounted scouts and, when they had returned, mounted again. This took time and the squadron, to prevent running down its advance guard, had to halt. Instead of the advance guard's regulating its march on the squadron, the squadron regulated its march on the advance guard.

They halted for dinner and to water the horses in a small stream. The troops could still see the town on the hill behind them.

At five o'clock, with darkness coming on, the Germans were still among the missing. Infantry patrols had been encountered during the early part of the afternoon, and some prisoners, mostly stragglers who had no idea where their regiment was, had been taken by the cavalry. The Swede noticed that even these prisoners did not seem to stir the troopers' interest. The men sat their horses on the march, or dismounted during the halts, with an air of disgusted boredom.

At six o'clock, after a half-hour's reconnoitering and standing to horse, the squadron entered a town. It was a small place—a few dozen houses, a butcher shop, a *mairie* and a church, with everywhere indications of German occupancy, but though the place had not suffered from shell fire in the slightest, the inhabitants were gone. Deported, undoubtedly, or carried back with the retiring troops to prevent their giving information.

While the squadron commander and his staff were in the town and the squadron was dismounted and watering the horses at the bridge at the south exit, an airplane went overhead and fired a light. The Swede could make out with his glasses that it was an allied plane, and in a minute or two he could hear some one giving orders to "show the laundry"—that is, to spread a panel that would indicate to the airplane the troops that were below.

The plane circled once or twice, a message came down in a smoke-can and in a little while the word went through the squadron that the enemy line had been located and that the squadron would spend the night in the town and await further orders. Officers' call blew, and the Swede, leaving the still fractious mare in the unwilling hands of a trooper, went forward to the squadron staff.

"Gentlemen," began the major, when the officers had assembled, "we have been ordered to camp here for the night. The enemy have been located at a distance of four kilometers. Infantry from the east are to advance along the front and entrench the line Rembercourt, St. Julien-Chambley. This is some distance in front of us. I imagine we will withdraw in the morning. Supporting infantry are to reach here within the hour. I

have selected that wooded knoll as the squadron bivouac."

The major then proceeded with the camp order, where each troop should bivouac, and said that each troop would furnish four men for outpost.

"We are some distance within the lines," said the major, "but it's just as well to be careful."

AFTER supper that night Mr. Canfield and the Swede sat on a log and smoked cigarets. The plain below them was not yet dark; they could see far-off dumps burning and, in the middle distance, roads with trucks and artillery on them. Then, nearest of all, the shelter tents of resting infantry.

A battalion or two of doughboys had come down the eastern road about an hour before and were now engaged on the other side of the town in digging holes to sleep in. Their brethren a mile away might sleep in their pup-tents, but these preferred to have a hole so that in case Fritz got nasty during the night the infantry might have some protection.

Far away to the south two friendly observation balloons swung at their cables. Directly in front, almost at their feet, lay the town. The ridge on which the cavalry were encamped surrounded the northern edge of the town, and the woods with which the ridge was crowned prevented observation from the direction of the German lines. The infantry battalion that had come from the east were camped in a field on the far side of the town, about a thousand yards away.

"Some of us asked the Old Man what the chances were of sleeping in the town," said Mr. Canfield suddenly. "It's full of beds and houses that will be dry in case of rain, but the Old Man said no. The Boche might bombard it and there we'd be, and then again he said that since Columbus he believed in having the officers near their men. You know at Columbus the officers lived on one side of the town and the men on the other, and when Villa rushed the place the men had to fight without officers."

"They must have been thankful to Pancho," said the Swede. "Hasn't this been a wonderful picnic! I've slept in my clothes and wore gun, map-case and glasses all the time so that I'd always be ready for a fight. And what did it get me? I've ruined a good uniform and my disposition. I said we'd go round and round and go home. I left my blankets with the wagons to lighten my horse."

He laughed a scornful laugh.

"She's fresher now than when she started, and I'll probably freeze to death tonight. I want to sleep, too, because I didn't get any last night and I'm pooped from riding all day."

"The Old Man wanted to know why you didn't wear your helmet," said Canfield. "I told him you lost it. He mightn't have seen the joke if I said you spun it away in a fit of mad rage last night."

"Oh ——," said the Swede, "I tell you my troubles and all you do is mutter some folly of the Old Man's! What kind of an outpost line has the old boy got?"

"Strong enough," said the other, "and a division of doughboys from the right end of the sector between us and the Boche. The Old Man said he thought the line was stabilized anyway. They're going to drag us out of here for a bigger push somewhere else."

"Push me no pushes," said the Swede. "I'd get more excitement in an old ladies' home than I will with this squadron. I think I'll put in for a transfer."

REVEILLE was at daylight on another foggy morning. The squadron saddled up, rolled up its picket lines and stood to horse. They were in strange country and within striking distance of the enemy, so the major was taking no chances on getting lost in the fog. From his experience of the day before, he judged that the fog would rise any minute, suddenly, like a curtain, and that if his orders had arrived by then, he could take up the march.

The horses had not yet been watered, but that could wait until the squadron

passed through the town again. Watering in fog causes confusion and intermingling of units, and is a difficult operation at best.

The Swede sat alone with his back against a tree, the chestnut's reins held idly in his hand. He smoked and thought of what a sad thing war was anyway. A man crashed through the bushes and, seeing the Swede, saluted.

"Officers' call, sir," said he.

"Haven't they got any trumpeters?" asked the Swede, as he rubbed out his cigaret on his boot.

"The major didn't want to blow the call, sir, because of the fog and everything. The Boche might hear it."

"Huh!" grunted the Swede.

He got stiffly to his feet. The chestnut, at the sound of the orderly's coming, had jerked up her head and torn the reins from the Swede's grasp, but as she bent her head again to sniff the ground, the Swede had not bothered to grasp them again. Now as he reached for them the chestnut moved very daintily a few feet, dragging the reins on the ground.

"Whoa!" said the Swede. "Now don't act the —— fool! I'll club you till you can't stand!"

The mare walked haughtily away, the Swede a yard from her flank. He knew that if he ran she would trot, perhaps gallop, and that might be the end. They wandered across the field, the Swede cursing. The sun once more showed his presence through the haze and the Swede knew that the fog would lift in a few minutes. What a spectacle then, for the squadron to see him chasing the mare! Behind him the Swede heard the sergeants giving orders to form column. The major also sensed that the fog would lift and was preparing to move out the instant it did.

The mare, her head high, stood stock still, listening. Her ears were going like wings and the Swede seized the moment to steal quickly up. The mare flung her head about to look at him and then, to his intense surprize, turned and walked directly toward him, where she thrust her head into his hand and sniffed. The Swede gathered the reins and was about to mount, when the mare turned her head again and flicked her ears, but she was listening to something in the direction of the town.

"There's the doughboys coming in," muttered the Swede.

He hoped it was not the same outfit that had witnessed his discomfiture the day before. The mist began to go away as it had yesterday in successive layers. He mounted and turned to ride back to the squadron.

The major had summoned the officers to a council on a little point of land just beyond the woods and behind the outpost line. He had viewed the country from there the night before and he meant to point out the different features of the terrain to the officers, so that they would have a good idea of the geography of it during the day's work, whatever it might be. The sun had taken on its ball-like appearance; the fog was yellow instead of gray, and in another minute or two would be gone.

"Gentlemen," began the major, "I expect orders any minute now, probably by motorcycle. What they will be I haven't the slightest idea." He stopped suddenly. "All your officers aren't here, Captain," the major remarked to the Swede's troop commander.

The captain looked about and saw that the Swede was absent. Where was he? The fog rolled away as if it were on wheels.

"——!" cried the major, "look at the Boche!"

The fog now was but a mist; it curled like smoke. The major could see clear across the fields to beyond the town, where there was another wall of fog. On the road coming from the town was a column of German infantry followed by its wagons and kitchens. Under the trees by the bridge a battery was already in position, its gunners occupied in digging holes for themselves.

All around him the major heard exclamations and the slapping of binocular

cases as officer after officer took out his glasses for a look. The major estimated the column on the road as that of at least four or five hundred men, possibly a regiment with its strength reduced by casualties and prisoners during the attack.

It was a moment for rapid decision. The major remembered that he had given orders to have the squadron formed in column along the edge of the woods for greater speed in moving out and that the Germans must locate them any minute. Thought after thought raced through the major's mind. Something had gone wrong; there should have been infantry in front of him. His outposts were still out. Why had they not reported the approach of this column?

With every second that ticked the Germans were advancing along the road and the squadron was being cut off. Where were the infantry that had camped in that farther field during the night? The major turned his glasses that way. They were gone. Of that city of tiny tents, not one remained.

"Look, look, look!" cried the officers.

There was a long drumming sound, and the major, his heart turning to water, saw a troop of American cavalry in line trot across a field and vanish into the ravine before the town. Two troops more, echeloned like a flight of stairs, followed the first. The column on the road halted and signs of slight confusion were visible in the ranks.

"By ——!" cried some one. "It's the Swede and he's going to charge 'em!"

"Where are you going, Canfield?" cried the major.

Mr. Canfield had left the group and, running to where an astounded orderly held his horse, mounted with a bound and was off at a dead run after the squadron.

"Oh, the —— fool!" cried the major. "Here! Where's a trumpeter? Blow recall! Isn't there a trumpeter anywhere?"

There was no trumpeter. There was no hope. There was the squadron coming into sight again at the gallop, surging across the field that rose gradually to the road, toward a column of unbroken infantry ready to receive it.

The major groaned. The column in the road had faced to the right and their rifles were already cracking. Beyond the trees an indistinct mass of Germans advanced at the run to reinforce their comrades on the road. The roar of the squadron as they swept cheering into a dead run came faintly to the men on the hill.

The Swede, as he mounted in the mist, had heard the column emerging from the village. His first thought was that it was American infantry, but as the mist had risen he had seen a fringe of German scouts some distance beyond the town.

At once he galloped to the waiting squadron, signaled "mount" with his saber, and sent two messengers scurrying with orders for the other two troops to follow in echelon, regulating their march on the first troop. The squadron moved out, the Swede signaled "line," the troops formed line under shelter of the ravine and emerged at the far side at the gallop, with about a hundred and fifty yards separating them from the road.

"Charge!" yelled the Swede, standing in his stirrups and waving his saber.

The men gave a ringing yell and each sank his spurs into his mount's ribs. They seemed to flow over the ground toward the Germans. The Swede rode well to the front, the mare running like a machine. He remembered that in charges he had seen on parade grounds and in maneuvers the horses had arrived at the mythical enemy in scattered groups, due to the difference in speed of the horses and the tendency of the men to turn them loose. The Swede kept yelling therefore, to keep the line, and so retain its full shocking power.

"Stay back on the left!" he bellowed. "—— it, hold those horses back! Don't get ahead of the line!"

He could see horses going down in heaps and realized he must be under fire. Behind him B and A troops had merged into one solid line and farther

back C was evidently in trouble. He turned to the front again. The Germans looked at the advancing horsemen with open mouths.

The Swede wanted to laugh. In front of the column a half dozen machine-guns were being set up and the crews were jumping about like bugs. Rifles were crackling from the line and the Swede could make out officers running about shoving men into place and telling them to hold up their bayonets.

"Go get 'em!" howled the Swede.

They were upon the machine-guns now, the mare spurned one under foot and the Swede made a futile slash at one of the gunners. White, strained faces stared at him, he heard indistinct cries, and then the mare was rearing and plunging amidst a mass of gray men, all of whom had their backs turned to the Swede.

He slashed and poked and jabbed at them with his saber, parried a wild bayonet thrust and cut savagely down at the man's head. His saber broke again on the helmet, a few inches from the hilt. The mare reared and struck out with her forefeet, sending a man thudding to earth with a broken face. The Swede tried to free himself of the broken saber, but he had twisted the saber knot so that it was impossible.

"Never mind trying to kill 'em all," he told himself. "See what's going on. You're in command here."

He stood in the stirrups and cast a hasty look about, in spite of the mare's plunges. The Germans had not stood to the charge. They had seen that wave of horsemen roll out of the mist, engulf the machine-gunners and bear thundering down on them. The front rank had wanted to seek a less conspicuous position, and in the confusion the charge had driven home.

The infantry had broken, fled and were lost. Yet all was not well. There were too many riderless horses about. The squadron was being shot up from somewhere. Yet in all directions Germans fled and cavalrymen pursued, some with sabers, some with pistols and some firing their rifles from the saddle.

"Rally!" cried the Swede. "Rally!" He waved his arms around his head and repeated the call. "Blow rally, trumpeter! Rally men!"

After some time others began to take up the cry. The Swede had just noticed the battery of guns under the trees by the bridge. The guns were being swung about, and no time must be lost. Men were rallying in back of him. He saw that he had not another second to wait. *Blom!* went a gun, but the shell cracked above and behind them, shrapnel with a poorly adjusted correcter.

"Guns!" yelled the Swede.

They rode for them, he and his men, not more than a platoon. Some of the gunners fled, others tried to fire a second shell, but the horses were at them, jumping over the trails, upsetting limbers and scattering shell-cases far and wide.

The Swede again paused for a look. Ah! They were being shot up from the town! Why didn't he think of that before? Where was C troop? Had they been wiped out? The Swede could rush the town mounted, or he could dismount the men and leaving the horses in the shelter of the river bank, make an attack on foot. This latter would lose valuable time and would be very risky indeed.

There was a wild rattling of wheels and the Swede, looking quickly up, saw that some of his men had discovered and stampeded the carriages of the artillery.

"After the limbers!" shouted the Swede.

The men responded, spurring their horses in the wake of the carriages, calling to their comrades to rally and follow. The limbers tore across the fields toward the town, crashed through and demoralized a company of infantry that were putting up a good scrap from behind a hedge and went tearing down the street.

One team slammed their caisson against the wall of a house, the harness broke and they continued their career. Another, its wheel horses bucking madly, tore off across the field toward the

American bivouac. The rest thundered through the town and after them the yelling cavalry, shooting to right and left.

The horsemen, happily, did not arrive in the town in a mass, but one by one, and in small groups. They were therefore all the harder to hit. In addition they were running at top speed.

In the square before the church five or six wagons were parked, their horses lined up alongside the last wagon, eating hay. Into these wagons the caisson teams charged, overturned and shattered several, and then, kicking themselves free of the wreckage, continued down the street, knocking down and trampling under foot some German riflemen.

The Swede sensed that the moment had come for dismounted action. The fire from the houses was getting hotter and more accurate, that from the *mairie* being the worst. He looked about for cover for the horses, and his eye lighted on the *lavoir* or public wash-house that graces many French towns. This one was beyond the church and the Swede galloped there. Some very scared looking Germans came out with their hands in the air, but the Swede had no use for them. He leaped from the saddle, led the chestnut in and then tied her halter shank around the door post.

"Put as many as you can get in there," directed the Swede to the men that had followed him. "Stick the rest behind the wall or put 'em in that house over there. Get 'em under cover. How many have I got now?"

He looked anxiously around. There were about six men with him, two more were dismounting and taking their rifles from the gun boot. One's horse was hit and rolled kicking on the ground, and the other turned his loose to stay or gallop away as he saw fit.

"Eight men!" cried the Swede, "I can't do anything with eight men! Come on, over behind the cemetery wall and we'll keep the *mairie* under fire while I get some more men."

The square or *place* of the town was a triangular affair with the church on one side, the *mairie* on the other and a large house on the third. Behind the *mairie* and the church ran the little brook that traversed the town. From the cemetery behind the church one could have some kind of protection and could fire on the *mairie*.

The Swede's force began to grow by leaps and bounds, for dismounted men kept coming along under cover of the river bank. No more mounted men appeared. Either the squadron had lost all its horses or some one else had given the order to fight on foot.

The Swede decided that it was time for a cigaret. The men with him in the cemetery were firing through the gate at the windows of the *mairie;* a corporal had climbed a tree and was yelling to all the dismounted men he saw to make a rush for the cemetery. For the moment there was nothing to do, yet a decision must be made and quickly.

The Swede thought with a slightly panicky feeling that he could scarce count thirty men out of three hundred that he led into the fight, that all control over the squadron had been lost with the rush into the town and that if there were a considerable body of Germans in the vicinity, he could expect a counter-attack within a very few minutes —and a counter-attack meant the wiping out of the squadron. The Swede thought bitterly of all the officers, safely viewing the fight from the hill, or else long ago seeking safety in flight.

"By ——, they may have all been captured or killed," muttered the Swede. "And I, the last survivor, will go down in history as the man that fought to the death against overwhelming odds!"

He was tremendously cheered by this thought. He took another look around. Though there was a hot exchange of fire between the *mairie* and the cemetery, none of the Americans had been hit as yet and a platoon had just come in from the opposite side of the wall. The Swede could hear a sergeant of the newcomers excitedly telling how he had come around through the fields, had dismounted his

men and, having heard the firing from the cemetery, had come in.

"What's going on in the other end of the town?" yelled the Swede.

He could hear rifle fire and the purring of machine-guns and he was soldier enough to know that men fighting without leaders do not last very long.

"I don't know," said the sergeant. "There's a scrap going on in the orchard where we charged them guns, but we didn't get shot at from the town much."

"The *mairie* is the nut to crack," decided the Swede. "Then we'll police up the town from this side. And we've got to work fast. This shooting will draw every Boche for miles. Sergeant, I'll leave you in command here. Keep up a heavy fire on the windows of the *mairie*. I'm going to rush it with all the men I've got. I'll leave you about twenty.

"In case I'm a casualty, take the survivors and try and get back to the orchard. Find out who's fighting there and get them to send some one back to the bivouac if they can. The officers may be there. If they aren't, they've gone for help. At any rate, keep on fighting. One of our planes may report the fight and we might get help at any minute. Now, then, the men along the wall as far as where I am, stay with the sergeant."

The Swede blew his whistle long and shrilly.

"Cease firing," he yelled.

The men complied after a while and in the silence, broken only by the sharp cracking of the rifles from the *mairie* and the distant firing in the orchard, the Swede gave his orders.

"Every one put in a fresh clip! These sets of fours stay with the sergeant. We're going to rush that building there. Every one except the men with the sergeant will fire one clip rapid fire, then the rest of the men will draw pistol and follow me across the square. Leave your rifles here. You men with the sergeant will have to shoot like —— to cover the rush."

"Our ammunition's kinda low, sir," remarked the sergeant.

"The men that go with me give two clips apiece to the sergeants," directed the Swede. "Make it fast, now!"

"At the first blast of the whistle we begin to shoot. At the second blast you men follow me. If I'm hit, keep on going. We've got to clean out the *mairie* or we can't get back into the town."

The sergeant hurried along the line, filling his helmet with clips of ammunition, the men began to reload, and some to remove their spurs so that they could run better. The men kept gritting their teeth, swearing under their breaths and their movements were nervous and hurried. They knew they were probably going to their death and the prospect was not the slightest bit pleasing, but it was more excitement than fear that was affecting them.

"Are you ready?" cried the Swede.

His heart was hammering and he kept drawing deep breaths to ease the tightness in his chest. He knew the men must be ready, for they were all looking at him with white faces and tight lips. The whistle shrilled. A hot rattling fire burst from the cemetery, so loud and rapid that all other sounds were shut out by it. The Swede watched, his whistle at his lips. The men firing began to lay down their rifles one by one and then the twenty who were to cover the assault prepared to open fire. Another blast from the whistle.

"Follow me!" roared the Swede.

The twenty leaped upon the low wall, the better to see, and their rifles began to bark like machine-guns. The Swede tore through the gate and after him, from behind the wall, tombs and headstones rushed the other men, yelling hoarsely.

It seemed a long way across that square. The Swede noticed that other men poured from the houses across the street, Americans all, some with pistols, some with sabers and some with rifles. He could see some of these men fall.

At last the *mairie*, and the Swede took the steps in two flying jumps. It was dark in that building; there was a fearful smell of powder smoke. He made out one or two dim figures. The Swede fired

his pistol at them and made for the back of the hall where he could see a stair. He pounded up the stair.

Crash! The Swede felt a sharp blow on his leg and feared he had been hit, but the leg still functioned. At the top of the stair he ran his pistol into a German full tilt, and whether or not his pistol exploded he never knew, save that the other fell and slumped back out of the way. The stairs forked to form a gallery, and the Swede, never stopping to see whether he was followed, took the left turn at a venture, and so into a room.

It was full of Germans; the Swede emptied his pistol into the mass of them. Figures danced before his eyes, men appeared and disappeared. All was smoke, confusion and tumult. There was incescant yelling, the cracking of pistols, the sound of their reports intensified by the confined space, and frequent crashes like thunder claps.

Gradually it began to clear and the Swede was conscious of a crushing pain in his arm. He turned to see whether his arm was still in place and looked into the round white face of one of his corporals, who hung to the Swede's right arm.

"Leggo my arm!" cried the Swede.

"It's all over!" said the corporal. "Don't go knockin' them fellers; they surrendered."

The Swede weakly uprighted an overturned chair and sat down. His pistol was gone and he had been slugging right and left with the guard of his saber, the broken remnant of which had clung to his wrist all through the fight. He could not remember what had suggested to him to grasp the hilt and use the guard like a set of brass knuckles.

The guard was slightly dented, so that it seemed the Swede had put it to a good use. There were some very sprawly dead men in that room, so the Swede staggered to the corridor, where he hung weakly over the rail. There were more dead there, Americans and Germans.

"Have a drink, sir!" said the corporal.

He proffered his canteen and the Swede weakly raised it to his lips.

"Hmm!" said the Swede, straightening up. He took another swallow or two, then a long draught. "Hah!" he cried, soughing slightly, "where did you get this?"

"Out o' one o' them jerry officers' rooms in Hattonchattel," said the corporal. "There was a bottle of it there, but I couldn't carry the bottle, so I put it in my canteen."

"You've saved my life," said the Swede. "I'll see that you're made a sergeant. Now, then, let's see what happened."

There was a sudden burst of yelling from without and the Swede running to one of the front windows, peeked through the broken shutter. A considerable number of Americans had come up through the houses across the street and at their head the Swede recognized Mr. Canfield. The Swede at once went downstairs.

"Where the —— did you come from?" cried the Swede, rushing across the square.

"Been having a fight," said Mr. Canfield. "I jumped on my horse and got down just in time to get hold of C troop. I'm surprized that you didn't know enough to have a support to your attack. Well, I just had time to echelon C by platoons and swing 'em to the left where there were a flock of jerries coming out of the town.

"Then we dismounted and let drive into a gang that came out of the woods behind the town. I yelled to you when you went by after the caissons, but I guess the mare was running away with you so you didn't hear me. We used some captured machine-guns to advantage."

"Where are your horses?" cried the Swede.

"In the houses and barns," said Mr. Canfield. "Got prisoners holdin' 'em."

"Prisoners holding 'em?"

"Surest thing. Means more men for the firing line. Well, my gang of jerries have hauled, so I came down to help you out."

"Corporal," cried the Swede, "take a

gang and run those wagons across the street to form a barricade. You can take those packs over there to stop the gaps with. You man there, go tell the sergeant in the cemetery to send a patrol of four men across the brook and into the field to see where the Boche are. You, Corporal, take ten men and bring the wounded into the *mairie*.

"Come on, Canfield, let's look the place over and see what we've got to do by way of defense. Where the ——'s a trumpeter? Ah, there you are. Got a panel with you? On your horse? Well, you —— quick get that panel and be ready to lay it out if a plane goes over. The rest of you men line that barricade as soon as it's ready and keep your eyes peeled for a Boche. How's the west side of the town?"

"I left a platoon there in observation," said Mr. Canfield. "It seems to be quiet."

"Come into the citadel—that is, the *mairie*—and see what our fight was like," said the Swede.

The *mairie* had evidently been used as a command center, for the first floor was occupied by offices, but empty and disordered. The documents had all been taken away in the retreat.

"These birds must have come into the town in the night," said the Swede, "and moved out again in the morning, and that's why our outposts didn't see 'em. Maybe they heard the noise and thought it was some of our troops."

"But we're supposed to be behind our own infantry," said Canfield. "How the deuce did thy get through?"

"Ah, you know the infantry," said the Swede. "They got tired and camped where they were. This gang here was probably a flying column sent out to find our front line, with orders to keep going until they met resistance and then dig in."

The two officers went up the stairs. The new German troops had started to use this building as a barrack. Gray blankets were everywhere, packs half made up and clothing lying about showed that the garrison of the *mairie* had either been surprized coming in from a march or preparing to go out again. The greatest number of German dead was in the upper story on the side facing the cemetery.

"It appears from the conversation I hear," said the Swede, "that the Huns hung over the gallery here and let drive grenades at us as we came in the door. It takes some time for a grenade to go off after the string is pulled, so by the time they had fired the first two or three we were on 'em. You'll observe that the first grenade gave me quite a shove."

The Swede exhibited his leg, from which the boot and breeches leg had been removed as if with a knife. Underneath the skin was turning from red to blue.

"And mind you, it didn't even draw blood," said the Swede proudly. "Do you think I rate a wound stripe for that?" he continued.

"You goldbrick!" laughed the other. "Not on your life!"

"Have a look at these stiffs, Canfield," said the Swede coldly. "You're an intelligence officer, if not intelligent. What outfit are we up against?"

Mr. Canfield inspected the shoulder straps and identification tags of the German dead.

"Forty-Seventh Infantry, Tenth Division," he said. "Prussians, Veterans of the Masurian Lakes and Château Thierry. They were here for a rest evidently. They're a good outfit as Boche outfits go nowadays."

"There's a good field of fire from these windows," said the Swede, looking out of one. He stiffened suddenly.

"What is it?" asked Canfield, tugging at his field-glasses. "Boche?"

"No," said the Swede, "here comes the major and all his gang."

In a flash the Swede saw march in procession before him the events of the last half hour. He had run away with the squadron, had charged a column of infantry and had galloped wildly and in disorder into an occupied town, all of which is wrong according to every precept

of cavalry tactics. Now the squadron was probably almost entirely on foot, their horses wounded, killed or vanished into the scenery, and at least half the effective strength destroyed.

The Swede stole another look through the shutter. The major was quite close now, the staff had drawn rein and dismounted, and all were picking their way through the wounded across the square.

"Go down and meet him, Mr. Canfield," said the Swede. "You are now about to see one of the advantages of rank. The buck has been passed. Go down and draw the old boy's fire. I'm a casualty."

"What do you mean, casualty?" cried the other.

"I'm dead or wounded, I don't know which," said the Swede. He seized a blanket and, lying down on the floor, covered himself with it. "It's my one chance. The least they'll do to me otherwise is to send me to Blois to count condiment cans the rest of my life. The Old Man might have me drummed out of the squadron.

"Nix. I don't dare face him after I broke up his outfit. I'll get evacuated and then I'll transfer to some other outfit. Go on down and meet him now and steer him out of here. For God's sake, don't let him see those dead horses in the other end of the town. Git now!"

The Swede straightened his limbs and pulled the blanket over his face.

"Here lies a brave soldier," said Mr. Canfield, "dead from the neck up."

He went down the stairs and to the steps before the *mairie*, where he awaited the approach of the staff with some trepidation. The major mounted the steps and transfixed Mr. Canfield with a cold eye.

"What the —— is all this?" asked the major.

"Sir," said Mr. Canfield, with a slight cough, "we've just knocked the Prussians for a loop."

The major turned about and surveyed the square. A barricade had been formed with German wagons across the end of the street, and some fifty husky cavalry men were disposing themselves on mattresses to fire through the spokes of the wheels.

In the house opposite the *mairie* more mattresses were being stuffed into windows. Two sergeants were counting the constantly growing group of prisoners between the *mairie* and the church, a group that already contained two hundred or more. Other Germans assisted the Americans in carrying the wounded into the *mairie*, or to lay the dead in a neat row along the wall of the building.

"You officers take charge of your troops!" directed the major. "Canfield, come with me."

About half an hour later the Swede, peeking cautiously through the shutter, saw the barricade being demolished and what looked like German gun-teams being harnessed to the wagons. Then the wagons were brought across to the *mairie*.

"Ah," thought the Swede, "we're getting out of here and they're going to carry the wounded in those wagons."

He heard the clattering of many feet on the stair and had but time to seize the blanket and throw himself on the ground when the major entered, followed by the staff.

"Mr. Canfield tells me you're responsible for these dispositions," said the major, looking at the Swede with his cold eye.

Never an inquiry as to the Swede's health, never the slightest relaxing of that mahogany countenance.

"Yes, sir," said the Swede, and looked at Mr. Canfield.

That young officer was seen to grin. All the same, it was a dirty trick to bring the whole staff right straight to a man's hiding place to see him get a verbal hiding.

"I want to say that it was well done," said the major, "all of it, from first to last. If you'd waited a minute longer this morning they'd have seen us and gathered the whole lot in. Thirty seconds more and their machine-guns would

have been working. I saw you ride 'em down myself.

"We've beaten a regiment at least, taken two hundred and ten prisoners, and only lost sixteen horses and eight men killed. And that, mind you, gentlemen, without officers. Two to the whole squadron. This is just another instance of the American cavalryman fighting his own fight. We would have been down before, Lieutenant, but there was a patrol came out to cut us off and we had to shoot it up a little first."

"We're going to evacuate the place now; there's a withdrawal order out; the new line's about four kilos back. The infantry got the order last night, and so didn't go out in front of us, and the infantry behind us got it by motorcycle this morning. I suppose the messenger didn't want to hunt for us in the fog for fear he'd get himself lost. They happened to remember us after a while and a plane has just brought us our dope. Well, congratulations!"

He extended his hand and the Swede shook it weakly.

"Now, then, look him over, Doctor," said the major. "Let's hope it isn't serious."

Mr. Canfield held his breath until the doctor arose from his examination. It would be a sad anti-climax to have the doctor say that the Swede's wounds consisted of nothing but torn clothes.

"It's not bad," said the doctor, "but he'll have to ride out in the wagon."

"Good," said the major. "Make him comfortable."

He and the staff went out, but Mr. Canfield lingered.

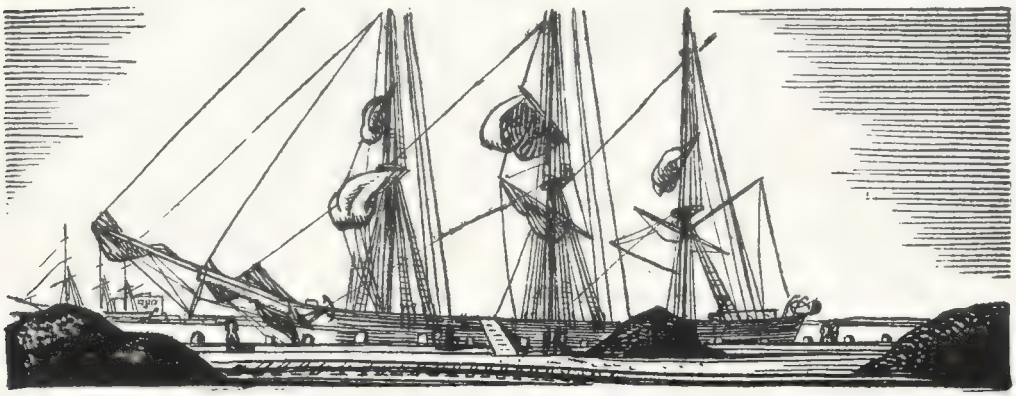
"Where do you get your drag with the surgeon?" he asked in a husky whisper.

"What do you mean drag?" cried the Swede. "I'm all blood."

"Are you really and truly hit?" asked Mr. Canfield with contrition.

"No," said the Swede, "but I figured that if the major had found me well and strong he'd have been much madder than he was, and as long as I was wounded I'd better stay wounded for a few days. So I just showed the doctor a little blood where the mare rubbed me through jumping around the way she does."

The Last Voyage of a Hoodoo Ship



With a Round Turn

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

TO GIVE a dog a bad name and then hang him may be all right for the dog. The dog is at least dead, and can no more be bothered by the chatter of men. But let a ship once earn the name of being a "killer", and the case is different, inasmuch as one can not very well hang the skipper for the ship's fault, and it is the skipper who must endure the opprobrium.

That was the trouble. Excellent old Billy Rounds had sailed his bark *Windrush* over many thousands of miles of salt water in the years he had owned her, and for many years of successful trading she had earned a name for swiftness, reliability and landing her cargoes dry and intact. That was while Billy's wife sailed with him. But Sally died, leaving a small replica of herself, ten years before; and while small Rosita stayed at home with relatives so that she might absorb some education, the *Windrush* acquired an evil reputation in a weirdly sinister fashion, which speedily frightened out a crew that had stayed by the ship for years.

First, there was the voyage when the mate died. Loading coal in Newcastle, New South Wales, a guy came unhooked from the whip and a basket of coal hit the mate, who was tallying in, squarely on the side of the head. It was silly. The thing happened without the least excitement. Even the mate, whose neck was broken by the blow, simply sat down on the deck with a foolish grin on his face, and two more baskets came aboard before anybody realized that he was dead and was tallying no longer.

Then there was the voyage, with horses, to Bengal, when one horse died and had to be slung overboard. That was a simple bit of sailor's work, to sling a dead horse, hoist it with a mast winch, and cut the sling when it ran up to the foreyard arm. Every seaman aboard the *Windrush* had done just that same thing a dozen times on previous voyages when "burying the dead horse" to signify that the month's advance of wages they had drawn was worked off, and all future work was earning money for them. The burial

of an actually dead horse tickled the men. The fellow who swarmed aloft to cut the sling, grinned and sang—

"Oh, poor old man, your horse is dead."

And his shipmates at the winch lustily bawled the refrain—

"Oh, poor old man!"

The sling was cut; the horse crashed into the sea. But the man who cut the sling went with it, his foot caught by the flicking rope end that whirled him end over end beneath the carcass of the horse as it struck the water. The horse floated astern, but the man never came up. He was crushed by the terrific impact of the water beneath the weight of the horse.

The next voyage, warping alongside the wharf at home, the cook, secure in his galley, peacefully stirring pea soup, dreaming of the girl he had left behind him, was stricken dead over his soup boiler by a falling cargo gin-block dropped by a careless sailor aloft, that flashed silently through the skylight. Only the sailor's warning, "Stand from under!" was heard by anybody, and that came too late for the cook to hear it at all. It simply drew attention to the galley, where the frightened sailor pointed with goggling eyes, and the cook was found in time for the steward to take over the cooking of the pea soup before it was spoiled.

The bark got a bad name. Crews were no longer easy to get. Captain Billy had to take what he could get. There was a good man in the mate, because the youngster was ambitious and appreciated very keenly the opportunity that had come to him at Newcastle in a basket of coal. He had expected to continue second mate for many voyages, since the old mate had been a fixture in the ship. With a good first mate, a sailing ship could potter along somehow, if she could get men of any kind at all for the mate to work on.

Billy Rounds grew taciturn and grim after two more voyages. At first he had scarcely realized that a bad name could stick to his beloved old bark. When first he had difficulty in filling his forecastle, he had made a grimace and contented himself by thinking that it would wear off after a voyage.

But on the first voyage after the cook was killed, in a glassy calm on the line, when the bark lay without forward motion, but rolling madly to the pendulum swing of a thousand tons of railroad iron, a man slipped on a rolling marline spike, dropped by somebody else, fell all doubled up, squarely into the maw of a bulwark clearance port at the instant it swung wide to leeward, and pitched through it into the sea. Men laughed as he went. It looked funny. Besides, he was safe enough apparently, having gripped the sill of the port with a strong clutch. He seemed unfrightened himself. But the ship rolled the other way, dragging him half clear of the sea, and the heavy port crashed on his fingers, forcing him to let go; and as the ship rolled further over him, the brace bumpkin struck him on the temple and he was never seen again.

The very next voyage Captain Billy Rounds took on his pilot, made his harbor, and saw his old bark come to anchor, with a feeling, half fearful but half sanguine, that his bad luck had evaporated. The *Windrush* swam gently up to her assigned anchorage, after a placid, fine-weather passage, with a paying cargo, and men who had growled under their breaths all the voyage began to grin and tell spicy stories of other homecomings, when the pilot sang out—

"Let go!"

Godey MacCreech, the carpenter, was at the windlass brake and let the cable run free. Ordinary seaman Phillips, for whom nobody had any use, but who always seemed to be in the way, hopped aside and stepped foul of a fake of the iron links. Phillips went with the chain. His squeal resounded for a league. Chips, honest Scot, bore down on the windlass to save the man and only succeeded in prolonging, agonizingly, the tearing apart of him.

Captain Billy Rounds was a changed man.

There had been a time when men from the seven seas spoke of Captain Billy as they spoke of God, with respect, with something of awe, yet with imperfect understanding because of his utter humanity. Captain Billy had never refused a brother seaman a helping hand. A good many skippers, sailing the seas in vessels of which they were part owners, owed a bit, and more, to Captain Billy for the shares they still owned. The worst a man ever said of Billy Rounds was that he drove a hard bargain when it was a case of his ship against another, and only one freight to get. But the men who said that of him knew, and admitted, that he was only doing his best for his daughter, the little Rosita, just now in a ladies' school at home.

WHEN Rosita had laughed her way through school, and danced along to her eighteenth birthday, she expected to laugh and dance her further progress to an art career. It may be said of Rosita Rounds that, whatever her progress was destined to be, she would undoubtedly dance to the goal.

Perhaps that was why old Captain Billy decided to take her to sea with him for a voyage or two before letting her embark upon more perilous seas. Perhaps finances were not as strong as they might be, for the name of "killer" had fastened itself upon the *Windrush*, and that affected cargo shippers as it had affected crews, as it had affected Captain Billy himself.

But it was rather more likely that her dad hoped Rosita might scare away the ghouls of fatality from his old bark with the joy of her presence.

Whatever the motive, Rosita one day descended upon the *Windrush* with her baggage, and promptly began to turn a sombre little stateroom into a bright and melodious nest. Her presence had effect before the bark went to sea. The steward, an old and loyal servant, who had followed Captain Billy through all his recent vicissitudes, regained something of his old time quiet grin. He passed the word along to a crony ashore, and when the *Windrush* signed on her crowd more than a half of the seamen presenting themselves had good discharges to show.

Friends who had turned aside from Captain Billy of late, peeved at his ingrowing grouch against the world and men in general, ventured to visit aboard his bark, to wish him a good voyage. There was even a hint of a cargo lying all ready for the bark when she had landed her present freight in the port of Calcutta. All of which might or might not be traceable to the influence of Rosita.

There were seven applicants for the second mate's job; but young Teddy Neal, the mate, who had gained his promotion by favor of a coal basket against the skull of his predecessor, was equal to that emergency. He had ideas of his own, born of the brighter, sweeter atmosphere that pervaded the bark. He was told to engage a second mate, and he did so—an old shellback, so long a second mate without hope of advancement that his sole notion of amorous dalliance was to woo his pillow and blanket for the full due of his every watch below, barring only those pleasant moments when food was placed before him, or when a bubbling old pipe sent prickling smoke into his nose.

It was not likely that such an ancient relic would intrude upon any of the spare time of Miss Rosita Rounds. That was Teddy Neal's idea. It seemed to be approved by Captain Billy, who nodded quite pleasantly when the new second mate was presented to him.

And on sailing day it was quite a little bit like the very old times of yore, when Sally Rounds kept house in the bark, and always gave a farewell supper or breakfast, according to what tide the *Windrush* sailed on. Many voyages had been made since the last of those pleasant gatherings was held. None had been given since the name of "killer" had been fastened upon the ship. Rosita took

matters in hand. Captain Billy demurred; said she'd have all her work cut out to find anybody to come to a meal at his table; but Rosita went out and had no trouble at all.

Captain Billy grinned rather sheepishly when four of his oldest cronies, hard-bitted old shellbacks of his own vintage, who had turned from him in sheer self-defense when his own nature turned sour, stumped down the companionway stairs and filled the cabin with blusterous greeting, sniffing at the steam from the pantry, heaving heavy and hard-hitting witticisms at him, willing to be forgetful of the past.

Last of all came Rosita, struggling merrily in the clasp of burly Captain Blades, her godfather, Captain Billy's oldest friend, who had turned from him last of all and who had apparently treated him like a wilful child who persists in hiding.

"You've grown a bit since I first carried you, Rosie lass, and you kick a mite harder, though not much," the jovial skipper growled affectionately. "But I can handle you just about the same. Which is your chair, lassie?"

"Let me down, Daddy Blades!" she panted, her two hands fast in his whiskers. "I have to play hostess for these well behaved gentlemen. Put me down or I won't put anything good in your coffee."

That was an old threat. Blades stood her on her feet in the midst of her father's guests, and laughingly greeted Captain Billy himself. Billy Rounds took the offered hand gladly enough; but seemed to feel conscious of a restraint which prevented his reciprocating, outwardly, the genuine warmth of his old friend's greeting.

Dinner was almost a merry affair. Old Blades bantered to left and right and Captain Billy was forced to smile. No one noticed that he was silent, so pleasantly he looked upon his daughter and upon the reunion with his old-time friends.

Toward the end of that friendly meal, Captain Billy laid a broad, hard hand upon Rosita's slim fingers and blurted forth to the company, with a catch in his husky voice:

"If you fellows got a grudge against me, I dunno as I can blame you altogether. But hang it all, am I to blame either? They call my ship a killer. You call her that. I get the name along o' the ship. All o' you have known me for years. Am I a killer? Do I deserve the luck that's fallen foul o' me? I ain't the killer, boys. It's the blamed jinx that's on the ship!"

They laughed, good naturedly, reassuringly, for they were full fed and comfortable. Old Blades had teased Rosita all through the meal, but now ceased his elephantine play and growled with rough affection:

"Jinxes won't stay aboard o' the *Windrush* now, Cap'n Billy. Never mind what people have said. They'll pipe a different tune now. Jinx! What'll you do to that Jinx, Rosie lass?"

Rosita laughed happily, and slipped another spoonful of "something good" into his coffee. She felt as if the atmosphere of the cabin had lighted tenfold with the progress of that intimate, friendly meal.

"We're going to have the best voyage the *Windrush* ever made, aren't we, daddy?" she replied. And Billy Rounds smiled in spite of himself, and believed.

WHEN the girl left the old men to their cigars and toddy, and went on deck to watch the fascinating picture of the river by night with young Teddy Neal, Captain Blades drew the skipper aside from the other old men and growled in his ear. They went into the skipper's stateroom.

"Cap'n Billy, I was almost scared o' seeing you this trip," Blades said when the door was closed upon them.

Billy Rounds raised a hand sharply.

"I know what you're going to say, and you needn't say it," he said. "Don't worry about that money. I'll ask you for it when I need it." His hand fell on that of his friend.

"I was worrying, Billy. I haven't raised it. Freights are not so good, what with steam and the big new steel ships. But if you ain't calling me, I believe I can get my head above water by another voyage. After that, maybe, I'll be able to put in that donkey engine and cut runnin' expenses a bit."

"You go ahead an' get you a donkey engine, Blades. I never was a shark, and you know it. Let's get out to the fellows."

And when the guests left the bark, much later, leaving behind them many and mellow farewells, Blades told the others of his astonishing experience.

"Best of it was," he chuckled, "Billy claims as he never was a shark," at which they all chuckled in concert, for decent old sailorman though Billy Rounds once was, no shark had ever bitten off a leg with greater relish than he had of late years shown in demanding his dues, even from old friends. Men who had gone to the *Windrush* in good old Sally Rounds' time, seeking a word of comfort in time of distress, came away comforted indeed, and armed financially against their troubles. And there was never a word of such devilish devices as bonds. But since Billy's ship earned the name of "killer," and he had persuaded himself that every man's hand was indubitably against him in all his comings and goings, men who owed him money avoided him as the plague unless they were able to pay, when they paid with bitter emphasis upon his character and ancestors. Men who did not owe anything to him, but who needed some help, went to the usurer ashore.

"So I'll get me that donkey engine, and I got a good mind to put in a new mainmast, too," vowed Captain Blades comfortably.

"Better wait a voyage. Some leopards may change their spots, but Billy Rounds ain't going to be whitewashed all in a dog watch," remarked the oldest crony of them all, who had taken just one more toddy than was good for his liver. "He'd give away his sea-boots with that gal alongside him. 'Most any man would. But if I was you, Blades, I'd sail slow for a traverse or two yet."

"D'ye think Billy Rounds 'ud lie?" demanded Blades, hotly.

"Did ye get any paper sayin' he wouldn't brace you up for that loan until any certain time?"

"Course I didn't. I know Billy Rounds. His word's his bond, for good or bad. I ain't scared."

"You don't have to get scared, Cap'n Blades," retorted the ancient. "All I says is, if that purty little lass don't have no luck in chasing th' jinx out o' that bark, watch out as her old man don't suddenly get a bad memory, that's all."

ROSITA seemed to have chased the jinx out of the *Windrush* by the time the Cape of Good Hope was rounded and the warmer seas of the Indian Ocean rolled blue from horizon to horizon. Teddy Neal worked upon the poor material of the lesser half of his crew until he had a capable crowd of men in both watches.

When Cap'n Billy laid in decent stores on his daughter's account, for this voyage, Rosita had won her point to amplify the quantity, so that the entire ship's company fared better. That alone went far toward making the old *Windrush* a happier ship than she had been for many a year.

Off the Cape, in the heavy seas that roll past Agulhas, when Cap'n Billy stood double watches in scarcely concealed uneasiness, fearing some evil he was not yet sure would not rise against him, the bark never parted a ropeyarn, never drowned a single hen in the coop, never once washed the doctor out of his galley. And never once was the forecastle bogey-stove turned cold and stinking by a torrent of brine pouring down the smokestack.

Across the line, into the Bay of Bengal, sunny skies and kindly, gentle seas accompanied the *Windrush*. She made such a fair-weather passage that her average time was amazing. She made no tremendous day's run; she never set the log line to smoking; but she arrived within

a hundred miles of Sand Heads two days under the record time.

To Teddy Neal belonged much of the credit for the bark's showing. And to Rosita must be given the credit for his ardor. She laughed at him, but her eyes did glow a little when she was watching him about his duties, making men follow him through sheer emulation, that spirit so hard to raise in modern sailormen.

It was Rosita who mourned the passing of the chanteys, without which no work was ever done aboard the *Windrush* in her childhood. It was Teddy Neal who got to know her feelings, and gradually worked the crew up to the point where they too began to sing, a bit out of voice, out of practise, stumbling over forgotten verses, but with enthusiasm that grew.

"Oh, 'way down south whar I was born,
Roll the cotton down!
'Way down south whar I wa-has born,
Ho, roll the cotton down!"

And when a calm came down and the bark sizzled in a fiendish heat, just when all hands looked forward to running up the Hoogly, behind a tug with her whistles tooting madly to tell the maritime world a record for sail had been shattered, men toiled in blistering torment at the daily spell of pumping, which the old *Windrush* needed now in fair or foul weather, and chanteyed manfully:

"As I walked out on Boston Docks, all on a summer morn—
Heave away, my bullies, heave away.
'Twas there I spied a pretty young gal, a-lookin' all forlorn—
Heave away, my bully boys, we're all bound away."

Captain Billy Rounds grew rounder, and his eyes almost regained their old time twinkle. He whistled softly when the calm came, and maintained his tranquillity even at the end of six hours of it, when still there was no trace or sign of change.

A mail steamer passed, bound out, and Captain Billy waved her a cheery greeting. A cargo boat passed, bound up the river, and was not even asked to report the *Windrush*, so sure was Billy Rounds that the breeze would be right along to waft him to the pilot.

The calm lasted into the night. At dawn there was less cheerfulness among the watch sluicing down the decks. But it was not yet time to grow discontented. The calm could not last. Steamers would pass frequently, and a tug could be asked for by any inward bound craft.

Not until the second day did Rosita detect a returning shadow settling over the skipper. She spoke to the mate.

"Can't you make the men sing at their work?" she begged.

"Ther's no work that singing's needed at just now, Miss Rosie," he returned, less buoyantly than usual.

Very soon Captain Billy had something to say. He bade the mates set the crew to work chipping chainplates against the fiery side of the blistering hull. The sound of the chipping hammers against the rusty iron resounded on the stagnant air like angry explosions.

"They can sing at that work, can't they?" Rosita asked again.

"Maybe they could, but I'd hate to bet they will," retorted Teddy Neal grimly. "I'll try 'em."

He tried them. There was a whimsical grin on his face as he turned from the ship's side and glanced towards the girl. Rosita needed no report as regarded the result. There was no song; but the words that floated up, in a moment's cessation of the hammer tapping, sent her into the shade of the poop awning with red ears.

In mid-afternoon a man fell from the stage overside, dead of a calenture, his hammer still clenched tightly in his hand, as if threatening vengeance upon the man who had sent fellowmen to such a task on such a day. Rosita had gone below to escape the frightful heat that persisted under the poop awning. The mate told Captain Billy:

"The men are coming aboard, sir. They won't stay on the stage."

Captain Billy had lost much of his ruddy color, and in his pasty face the

eyes, so lately twinkling, just glared like coals leaping from smoldering to blazing.

"Refuse duty, hey?" he snapped. "And you call yourself a mate, don't ye? Set 'em to work tarring down. Good weather for tarrying riggin'. The ship looks like hob, anyhow. Make 'm hop."

"Shall I get a boat over and pie up Bill's body, sir?"

"What in blazes for? Ain't he dead?" Captain Billy seemed suddenly aware that he was not acting quite like a humane ship-master. A bit of color flushed into his face. Rosita had been aroused by the muttering of voices, which reverberated upon the heavy air like shouts. She went on deck and emerged from the companionway as the skipper said, "Get him and give him proper burial, Mr. Neal. Tell the men to knock off work and stand by for burial party."

Rosita's eyes opened wide. She stood silently looking on while the boat screeched to the water, and the sullen sailors pulled astern after the slowly drifting body which still held in its stiffening hand the chipping hammer. As they returned alongside she stole beside the old man and pressed his rigid arm.

"Don't feel so badly, daddy," she soothed him. "You can't help the sun shining. Perhaps it was the man's own fault. They will expose themselves to the sun, you know. We'll find out if he has any folks, and do something for them, won't we?"

Captain Billy's face paled, and his body sagged heavily. His face was grim as he gabbled off a few lines of the burial service, an hour later, when the canvas-wrapped body slid over the rail. But he did not again send the men to work under the white blaze of the sun.

He paced to and fro restlessly, far into the night, seeking among the black velvet of the heavens some faint hint of a breeze; hungrily sniffing at every air that eddied about him with the tremendous fanning of the spanker, which not even vangs and boom guys could restrain entirely.

The men washed the decks before dawn and lounged the morning hours away. They had won a victory. No jobs were mentioned by the mate when washing down was done. And the calm hung like a steam dome over the bark. No feather of smoke broke the steel-hard line at the union of sky and sea.

The ocean had died. The Sand Heads were a hundred miles away; the yellow flood of the mighty Ganges spread over the sea from rim to rim; but no fish fought for the galley refuse; no birds squawked in answer to the challenge of the dilapidated rooster in the coop.

On the third day a strange uneasiness settled upon the forecastle crowd; at evening five men were ill with a fever; by full darkness a man died. At dawn he was buried, and by noon two who had buried him died.

Rosita nursed the sick. The skipper had visited them and they had cursed him evilly. The queer calm lasted out the full week, and when a light breeze blew, at last, the afterguard and the cook trimmed the yards to catch it, for the entire foremast crew was down.

Slowly the bark crept up to where the pilot vessel was cruising. At the end of two days of sluggish sailing, the *Windrush* made her signal for a pilot, flying the yellow-and-black flag.

On her way up to quarantine, a deep-laden ship foamed past her from astern, in tow of a bigger tug, and burly Captain Blades bellowed a ringing and boisterous greeting across the turgid river before he noticed the yellow flag. Then as the vessels overlapped and drew apart again his greeting became kindly commiserating.

The *Windrush* was leaving quarantine when Blades took his ship out again. There had been no chance for meeting, but Captain Billy knew that Blades had secured that fine big cargo that was awaiting the *Windrush*. Cargoes could not wait on sentiment. It was right that Blades should get it. But in Captain Billy's new bitterness it was only one more acid drop.

"Even them as eats at my table are

against me! I was a —— loon ever to think anybody wasn't. Him wi' his new mainmast and donkey and all. And me payin'."

WHEN the *Windrush* was released from durance and lay in the river tier with a cargo of sorts drummed up on the wharf, Captain Billy visited his agent, drew some money and sent Rosita off on a short vacation to some friends in Calcutta, then paid a brief visit to a firm of lawyers. When he returned aboard the bark he wore a furtive air which set the mate to wondering how deeply he had dipped into new devilment. Teddy Neal knew very well that the jinx had bred and multiplied rather than died, during the passage out. He had plenty of youthful faith and belief in things coming right; and he believed that Rosita would yet win the old man back to sanity.

The ancient second mate had quit; had announced in dry matter-o'-fact tones that he liked the *Windrush* fine, but he had a chance to go mate of a big four-master. Everybody knew that the old deserter shipped home before the mast aboard an overladen, starvation, Dundee jute ship.

Teddy Neal was uneasy, too, because Rosita did not return with her father that day. He scarcely dared inquire. He had all his troubles provided for him with the new crew sent down from the Home. And anyhow, his uneasiness was of brief duration, because Rosita returned in three days, before more than half the cargo was on board. She looked the better for her little holiday, too, had lost the dark circles around her eyes, and her lips had regained the redness she had lost while ministering to the sick at sea and enduring the nauseating monotony of quarantine.

Teddy Neal found heart to grin again, in spite of the burden of another of those crews which only had been the ill luck of the *Windrush* in her days of worst repute. He grinned simply because he saw a trace of humor in the situation of the old bark. She had gained the name of "killer" through losing a man every voyage for years. Then her crews had gone from bad to worse, all on account of her reputation.

On the recent passage out, she had enjoyed such a crew as only top flight clippers hoped to secure; and had killed half of them off. Now she was loading for sea, and in her forecastle was the kind of scum that any decent mate would gladly see killed off.

But Rosita soon sensed that a grim change had taken place in her father, and when she had sat through the first meal after her return, watching him studiously avoid meeting her eye, she went to his stateroom and would not be denied. Wheedling, coaxing, using all her wiles, she dragged the truth from him; and then stood bolt upright before him, her cheeks flaming, her eyes big with unbelief, her red mouth rounded.

"You're not going to do it, daddy?" she half whispered, and her tone made him avert his face. "You'll never break your word like that? And to Daddy Blades, too? Your oldest friend. My god-daddy. Have his ship seized for the paltry debt he owes you, after you told him to never mind it, to go ahead and use the money on his ship? You can't do it, daddy. What will men say of you?"

That brought the Old Man to with a harsh laugh. Rosita might have made him feel ashamed of the piece of work he had got legal aid to bring about; but when she reminded him of what people might think, or say, he laughed bitterly. Wasn't it just that which had rendered his life a misery? What people say.

"You better not bother your head about things you don't understand, Rosita," he said. "What folks say about me don't worry me. Nobody ever had much good to say about me anyhow. This is business, and I'm in the right. Bein' a good scout gets me nothing. There was a good payin' cargo here for me, wasn't there? Who got it? Blades! And got it while I was layin' to plague mooring. Got it all on account o' my money that paid for his new donkey engine and mainmast. Let

people talk. They're all hoping to see me beat, anyhow."

Rosita told Teddy Neal about it. Teddy shook his head. He was averse to talking about his skipper, at least against him, for he owed him much, and further, liked him for all his queer ways. For any shipmaster to lose a good cargo and be forced to rest content with a broken cargo for many ports, through sheer grim hard luck was bad enough for any man to endure; but to see that good cargo go to another man who only chanced to be on the spot through good luck, helped by the generosity of the man who lost and looked on, was sufficient to put bitterness into a less susceptible man than Captain Billy Rounds.

"Well, I'm glad he can't do it this voyage, at least," the girl cried warmly. "Captain Blades is well at sea by now."

"Hardly," the mate returned. "She hauled out into the river, a mile down stream; but no sailing vessel has gone to sea this week yet. Bad weather's reported in the Bay of Bengal."

"Then I can get word to Captain Blades!"

"Isn't that sort of playing against your father, miss?" Teddy Neal suggested gently. The girl darted a fiery glance at him, and her face was rosy red.

"I don't care," she snapped. "If you knew how contemptible my daddy would feel after he did a thing like this, you'd try to stop him too."

When Rosita tried to send word to Captain Blades the next day she was told he had gone to sea or, at least, had moved down to the mouth of the river, and was out of communication.

A steamer came hurrying in from the bay, reporting terrific weather up the coast. A storm signal flew above the Port Office building. Ships in the tier hauled off to buoys in the stream and native craft scuttled up river.

Captain Billy's attorneys came to inform him that the expected seizure would have to wait. And that news came right on top of the breaking off of loading and the enforced idleness and anxiety pending the coming or the passing of the cyclone.

ABOARD the *Windrush* a sullen unrest persisted. Other ships hauled out into the stream, and on none was there gladness, for when a cyclone swept the Calcutta river it stirred things up badly, and ships caught there were bound to suffer delay, if no more serious harm. Any craft caught alongside the wharves, or close to the river banks, was likely to leave her bones there when the big wind passed. So at such times the great river was full of bustling and tooting, of puffing tugs and growling seamen, swearing mates and fretful masters. But on no ship was there such an atmosphere of surly resentment as obtained aboard Billy Rounds' old bark.

The old man himself ranged about the poop in a temper that frightened even Rosita. There was no neglect of seamanlike precautions. Captain Billy was an old fox in weather matters, and he had seen Hoogly typhoons before. But his cup of bitterness was overflowing. This fresh delay, threatening already to eat up the profits of the miserable voyage that had promised so well, while Captain Blades was sailing gaily off home with a full, one-port cargo which ought to have been snug under the *Windrush's* hatches, proved the last thorn, against which Captain Billy's armor was not proof.

"Him with his new mainmast and donkey and all!"

Tugs scurried about the river, taking lines to buoys, giving a pluck out to dilatory ships. A flash liner stormed in from seaward, her awnings furled, her passengers crowding the rails. Far down the river the palms bent; the yellow water curled yeastily in patches. The storm flags on the Port Office were plastered against the heaping skies like postage stamps, rigid and flutterless in the wind.

The *Windrush* swung to a long scope at her buoy; a tug foaming across the river carried out her stern wire to another mooring. The liner dropped two anchors

in midstream and signalled for her tender to land the passengers.

Then, all in a breath, the wind fell to a zephyr, the air was dead for a moment, and a moaning grew out of the river.

"Get under cover and stand by, men!" ordered the mate, and the wind came with a screech and an impact that drove the bark down on her side until the yellow flood roared in at her scupper holes.

In a moment the river was blotted out in a driving screen of flying water. The flags on the Port Office shot from the halyards like two vivid leaves. A belated native boat capsized and leaped upon her wailing crew. A horse and gharry on the *bund* teetered for a second and toppled over into the river.

And before the first onset of the typhoon a small coastwise steamer foamed in from the sea, darting among the anchored shipping in a fashion that caused many a master and many a mate to catch his breath anxiously, before she finally ran her nose into a soft mud bank and came to precarious rest.

Her skipper had bawled something as he passed each ship in his course. Captain Billy Rounds barely caught the import, but it was sufficient for him to catch up his megaphone, run at the top speed of his plump legs along the deck, trying to keep pace with the little steamer, bawling for a repetition of the news. And when he had understood it, he stood for a moment, braced against the storm, staring down river with a queer mixture of evil elation and dubious alarm in his red face.

"What is it, daddy?" Rosita cried when he at last stumbled against the after house where he bade her remain.

"Blades is piled up on the William and Mary sand!" he panted.

For several minutes Billy Rounds sprawled, flattened by the singing wind, against the house, his sharp eyes glittering like diamonds as he squinted and peered through the flying wrack of rain and river water, vegetable débris and city dust which smothered the shipping.

The canopy of a pair-horse Victoria flew athwart the screaming air like a rĕd and white bat, and struck in the *Windrush's* rigging as if it had been woven there.

Teddy Neal crept aft, seeing the old man so intently peering into the storm.

"Seems to be holding on, sir," yelled the mate, seeking to get some information without deliberately asking for it.

"Hold on, thunder!" the Old Man screamed furiously. "Why shouldn't she hold on, Mister?" Rosita pressed against the lee door frame to hear. "Use your eyes, both o' you. D'ye see anything that looks like a tug moving? If you do, signal her."

"Nothing can move in this, sir," retorted the mate, squinting against the slashing downpour which drove almost horizontally across. "Not going to try to move the ship, are you, sir?"

Captain Billy risked a fall to turn fiercely upon Teddy, while Rosita shivered at sight of his streaming face.

"Blades has piled his ship on the sands! He isn't covered by insurance."

"Oh, daddy! Are you going to try to help him?" Rosita cried, all radiant with pride.

Teddy Neal caught her flashing eye and faced the old man with a new interest, although his own feelings might be vividly followed by his expression, which was a mixture of admiration and grave doubt regarding the skipper's sanity.

The most humane of men could never be expected to undertake rescue work in the hell of wind and waters now rising to deadly intensity. Yet Captain Billy Rounds once had the name of daring all for his friends. Cap'n Billy answered with a metallic snap:

"I'm going to try to save my own! The dog owes me money. If he loses his ship, he'll get a job sailing another for wages. But I can whistle for my money. I know him. I can't get blood from a stone. A shipmaster on wages is a stone, for any such money as that scut owes me. Look out for a tug, Mister. I'd buy a tug for twice what he owes me before I'd let him get away with that."

Rosita pressed her hot face against a port-glass. The mate peered shoreward.

Neither was deeply interested in tugs; neither gave much serious thought to Captain Billy's explosion. He would cool off. But Rosita had detected a bitterness in his reference to Blades which distressed her. His words epitomized a whole-souled reaction toward his previous conviction that all mankind was his enemy.

The pungent reek of drowned earth filled the air. It was stronger than the sickly effluvia rising from the churned river. A cow was hurled past, bellowing brokenly, head high, forefeet flogging. All along the esplanade, wreckage of boats was strewn, and trees whirled whole through the air.

A tug suddenly came out of the murky cyclone mists, steaming furiously against the terrific wind, going sidewise as much as forward, fighting her way across to the other side for a lee. Her erratic course drove her so close to the bark's stern that Captain Billy plunged to the rail to hail her.

"Want to leave her?" the tug skipper howled.

"No!" roared Captain Billy. "Take me down river!"

The tug sheered a little, and was rolled over by the blasts, until her decks filled. She righted, and wallowed on her way, her skipper shaking his head despairingly at such lunacy as wanting to go down river.

"Won't get any tugboatman to take that chance," grumbled Teddy Neal. "If one wanted to, he couldn't get alongside of us. He'd get stove in."

Captain Billy was watching the river. The wind blew straight across the mad flood from the Port Office side. The bark's bowsprit pointed toward the bare flagstaff. Her stern bore hard against the restraint of the wire. Rain filled the decks with steamy thunder. Overhead a terrific crashing and crackling suddenly broke out, and the mate started in alarm. The lower maintopsail was loose, and the chain sheets flogged the mainyard with murderous ferocity.

Teddy Neal knew none of his crew dared go up there to make that sail fast. There might be one, perhaps two, who would follow out of shame if he led the way. He clawed along the rail toward the main rigging, reaching the poop ladder at the instant that the stern wire snapped with a whanging hum in the fairlead and snaked into the roaring river. The jerk halted Teddy.

The bark began to swing and to drag. Captain Billy stood on wide spread feet, gripping the handrail on the house, squinting first aloft at the thundering topsail, then at the distance between his bark and the leeward shore. The last part of the gasket broke like a piece of thread, and the whole lower topsail tore madly at the spars. Teddy Neal shook his head.

"Drag out the men and sheet home that sail!" roared Captain Billy savagely. "You deaf? Sheet it home and loose the foretopmast stays'l! Tell Chips to see all clear for slipping cable. Get a move on. Want to see the sticks shook out of her?"

"She'll take charge and drag ashore if that sail fills aback!" screamed the mate.

"She's dragging ashore now! Sheet home. Get that stays'l loosed quick."

Only by assuring them that the ship was doomed unless they bestirred themselves did the mate get the shivering gang to man the topsail sheets. With the yard braced sharp up so that it was pointing almost into the eye of the storm, they dragged down the lee sheet. And, with the weather brace checked a trifle, they tackled the weather sheet, while the *Windrush* quivered to her keel bolts and began to take charge of her anchors under the terrific stress. Chips, on the forecastle head, chattered crazily to himself as he dodged the flying spindrift and wrestled with a cable shackle. The mate came up on hands and knees to crawl out and cut the gasket from the foretopmast staysail, leaving four men ready at the halyards.

There was an instant of hush in the storm, then the bark reeled under a vicious squall which started her staggering faster sternward.

Captain Billy bawled and shook his fists; but his words went out upon the

blast, rent into less than syllables. When both shores were blotted out in a whirl of rain and débris, and Chips crouched fearfully beside the windlass, with Teddy's staysail filling like a balloon with wind, Billy Rounds suddenly appeared on the forecastle like a fat little red god of wrath.

Bustling past Chips, cursing him savagely, the old man released and yanked up the lever of the controller, leaving Chips to dodge if he could. The drag of the bark made short work of the windlass once a start was made, and the chains went out in a shower of sparks. The wind filled the topsail all aback, and over went the *Windrush*, filling her lee deck and piling up foam beneath her counter as she gathered perilous sternway.

"Drag up that stays'l, and fill th' maintops'l for starboard tack!" screamed Captain Billy, bundling off aft before the gale, to hold the helm himself.

Rosita stood with her pretty nose flattened against the glass, trying to see, terrified at the awful thunder made by the boiling river flood under the stern. She saw the vague blur of the city suddenly begin to sweep past in an arc. There was a moment of chaotic uproar when the old bark seemed about to fall apart under the thrashing of the maintopsail suddenly spilled of wind and filling again as the yard was braced.

Watchful men in the Port Office ashore rubbed their eyes and peered again at a ghost of a ship flying down river. Some reported it, and surmised that it must be Billy Rounds, who had seemed a bit queer lately; others refused to risk being called crazy themselves and said nothing about it, putting it down to optical illusion. But on the poop of the *Windrush* Billy Rounds ignored even the almost admiring glance of young Teddy Neal and tersely ordered the reefing and setting of the spanker.

"Him and his new mainmast, donkey and all!" he muttered into his jacket collar as he steered the old bark through a wilderness of leaping yellow desolation.

Rosita shuddered, but not through fear of danger. Captain Billy was whistling through a gap in his strong yellow teeth, and the tune was:

"First I hung my mother,
Hoora-a-ah! Hoo-ray!
Then I hung my brother,
So hang, boys, hang!"

She always thought of the few times she had seen her father very angry when she heard that old chantey tune; for he sung or whistled it at no other time.

But the bark flew down river at terrific speed, leaning to the fierce gale in her scanty canvas until yellow froth shot across the decks from the gurgling scuppers. The fore topmast staysail and spanker bulged to leeward full of wind, too heavily stressed for the unwilling crew to sheet them in snugly. The straining topsail seemed about to burst.

River wreck, and débris of the jungle in the air, flashed past madly. Captain Billy ceased whistling long before William and Mary Sands were near. His fat cheeks turned gray at the devastation littering the great stream. The shores were hidden in flying spume; whole patches of jungle whirled by on the tide, with jungle denizens crying plaintively in terror. A lordly tiger crouched low upon a square of native hut structure, pads and tail in the water, every hair on end, and snapping, catlike, at the curling waves that licked at his refuge.

"Figuring on running out to sea?" yelled the mate. He wondered why the bark had not struck on the shoals long before, for the Hoogly was no river to run without a pilot. He knew that the anchors lay quietly in the mud opposite the city. Captain Billy's mouth quirked grimly. Dimly ahead, but coming closer with the speed of a locomotive, was to be seen the swaying shape of a tall ship.

"I was going to try to haul him off," shouted Captain Billy. "Now it looks as if my oinly chance of saving anything out o' him is to run close aboard and chuck him a seizure notice. I'll get something out o' the salvage, anyhow, the dog!"

"You daren't run that close. You'll lose the bark!"

"Daren't?" bellowed Captain Billy fiercely. "Hey, Rosita!"

Rosita crept out of her shelter. Another evidence of great anger in her father was that tone. She looked at him nervously.

"Get me that blue envelop from my desk, and bring a bit of spunyarn. Mister mate, get me a belayin' pin, quick."

So fast was the *Windrush* speeding that, before the envelop was fastened to the pin for throwing, it was necessary to decide upon the bark's maneuver. Everything flashed near in a blur. Men could be seen gesticulating to warn the *Windrush* off, from the poop of Blades' ship. Blades himself, tall, bareheaded, agonized of eye, cupped his hands to bawl. Billy Rounds snatched the prepared missile of ship seizure. Then he had to whirl the wheel to avoid a boiling whirlpool at the edge of the sands, and there was an instant of nerve-wracking suspense while the bark seemed to poise herself for a mad swerve, none knowing in what direction.

Billy Rounds swore fiercely, thrust the envelop between his teeth while fighting with the helm. Then, with a gesture of impotent fury, he snatched the belaying pin again, and hurled it, wrapped in its threatening blue, at Blades, as the *Windrush* quivered and started forward again.

The missile struck against the ship's mizzen rigging, and fell into the churning water. But Billy Rounds saw nothing of that. His bark plunged headlong between Blades's ship and the inner sands, her lighter draft—she was but half laden—giving her passage where the bigger and deeper ship had stuck fast.

"Stand by, lads!" roared Captain Billy desperately, fighting the stubborn helm with futile strength. "Mr. Neal, take care of Rosie. Hold on all! Jehovah!"

With a cataclysmic crash and rip, the *Windrush* smashed into the stranded ship, broadside to broadside. Blades' ship reeled dizzily toward the outer edge of the sand where deep water surged. The *Windrush* staggered, heeled over the other way, and rebounded to smash home another thundering blow, while Captain Blades clung to his shattered rails and glared, dumbfounded.

Teddy Neal snatched Rosita away to the rail as the bark's mizzenmast snapped under the combined stress of the baggy spanker and the collision.

Then the *Windrush* quivered and stuck on the sand. Blades' ship rolled heavily, swung halfway round, and darted free of the sand, driven clear by the charging weight of the bark.

Teddy Neal and Rosita stood together, watching the bark's crew pour out of their hiding places and board the other ship like panicky rats. And all unconscious of good or evil chance, Captain Billy Rounds lay across the wheel-grating, stricken down by the wild tangle of the mizzenmast.

BILLY ROUNDS lay in a clean hospital bed, with the sun shining mellowly through softening shades. Rosita sat near-by, with a queer smile in her moist eyes. Teddy Neal had just left. Many men had been there since the typhoon passed and the rescue parties had brought in the survivors. Captain Billy had been told half a dozen times that Blades had brought his ship to safe anchor far down river, but that the *Windrush* was a loss on the sands.

Men had said warm things, in the quiet way of men of the sea, about the madly daring heroism of Billy Rounds in sacrificing his ship for his old friend. Rosita had only just begged him not to flare up so furiously when his visitors murmured their praise.

"But thunder, girl, you know, and Neal knows, that I lost my bark serving him with that seizure paper. I ain't ashamed of it. Everybody's been against me; and if I got my claim in all snug on Blades I ain't complaining. Hero be hanged! I'm looking out for my own."

"But nobody will believe you, daddy," said Rosita.

"They will as soon as Blades tells 'em about that blue paper."

But Blades said nothing about a paper when he appeared.

"Billy, you're a daredevil old rascal," was Blades' greeting, and there was a little quaver in his lusty voice. "I never saw anything like it. Nobody but you would have thought of it, or dared to try it. Sorry the old *Windrush* had to go. But you're covered by insurance, I guess. And what d'ye think of that old killer going to her own finish like that, and never losing a man? You'll build a better ship, Billy, with nothing to live down. My shippers have voted me a fat purse for saving 'em money on their cargo, and I can meet that loan now. They talk o' giving you something handsome, too, soon's you're out o' bed." Captain Blades suddenly swept Rosita into a bear hug. "What d'ye think of your old pirate papa, Rosie? Everybody in Calcutta's yammering about him."

Rosita tried to tell Captain Billy what she thought of him, when visitors no longer intruded.

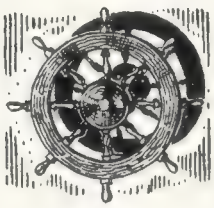
"You see, daddy, nobody believes you were trying to be mean. Nobody ever will, who knows you."

"But that seizure. He didn't mention it, Rosie."

"He never got it. It fell in the river. Daddy, being bad doesn't fit you. You don't know how."

Captain Billy Rounds wasn't very clear about it all. It all sounded queer. As long as he had been a decent old man luck had been against him, and men had looked askance at him. As soon as he tried to act like a bad man the whole world smiled upon him and called him hero.

"It's brought me up short, with a round turn, that it has," he murmured as his tired eyes closed in healing sleep.



A white man's wager on Chinese honor

A Complete Novelette By R. E. HAMILTON

Behold My Friend

HE WAS the happiest man in South China. He was fat too; not with the flabby fat of indolence, for his muscles were like the roots of the banyan, and he had been known to haul with his own hands a Manchurian pony from a tide-water canal, where it had bogged itself.

Rounded jowls, and a roll about his waistline—that was his surplus tissue; his arms and legs were ironclad. And because it is lucky to be fat in China, where most of the poor devils are skin and bone, the natives would come to the doors to watch him pass, and the shopkeepers form a circle to wait on him, and the table boys in the bachelor messes on the Foreign Concessions put an adoring finger on him when he wasn't looking.

"*Ho taai*," they used to say, in admiration.

His name was John Joseph McGonigle, and he hailed from Saginaw. He hadn't been home for nineteen years, and it's likely he would never be home again. He'd heard the East whistling to him, that fellow.

It was after the great Hongkong typhoon that we met John Joseph. Hongkong is the fairest city of China, but if you had seen it that day you'd never believe it.

There were masted schooners picked out of the waves and lying like stranded fish along the Praya, so that traffic circled in and around them. There were signs and lanterns and pieces of roofing strewn over Queen's Road. Every mat-shed was smashed flat, and at Repulse Bay, where the beach is lined with them, it was as if some one had upset a trainload of toothpicks. A Chinese steamer had gone down with all hands in Hongkong harbor, and there were Chinese women at the sea-wall shaking their hands from side to side, palms together, and making moaning sounds. The Tung On had ridden the storm and lay rocking in the bay, being too wide to overturn, but there was another river boat from Canton that had tried for the shelter of Stonecutters' Island, through the storm, and failed; it was now stuck on a rock.

The whole coast felt that storm. And though the shrine for sailors in the temple at Macao was filled all night with those

who prayed, there were more junks lost and fishermen drowned than there were candles for.

All over the island of Hongkong there were diggers clearing off the streets. Toward Happy Valley there had been a landslide which barred the road, and the crews were shoveling fast there, their clothes flapping and the denim curtains on the women coolies' hats blowing out in the wind, which was still strong though the typhoon signals were down at last. Every one we met wore a strained look, as if he were still expecting his house to be blown into the sea. Even the Sikhs were uneasy, having an eye for loosened rocks and leaning tree trunks.

The wife of one of the fellows from the consulate was out at Repulse and, as telephone communications were down and the roads impassable, except on foot, he and I had walked out to the other side of the island to see how she was.

We were coming back now, completely fagged, when the fellow—Hempstead he was, from South Carolina—said, "Here's McGonigle," and stopped in his tracks.

McGonigle was tramping toward us along the road, through the litter of palm branches and banyan boughs and fallen rocks and dirt and drenched hibiscus flowers. He had his head thrown back, facing the breeze, and he walked without a quiver beneath an undermined tool-shed that was hanging to the bank, you might say, by a nail. He was eating fresh lichees with a beatific expression.

He had his pockets full—there must have been two catties of them—and his fingers were sore from cracking them, so he was biting the shells and throwing them into the grass as he walked. It was funny to see him so at peace with the world while every one else was on the ragged edge.

"McGonigle!" said Hempstead, and held out his hand.

"Hempie!" said the fat man, and grabbed the hand and pumped it up and down.

They were off, then. All I could hear was, "The Straights—Wei-hai-wei—Pago-Pago—Thursday Island—Melbourne—Yunnan Foo—Sourbaya—Singapore." The fellow had been everywhere, and Hempie hadn't seen him in years.

Finally, when they had exhausted geography, Hempie said:

"Bad blow yesterday. Where were you, John Joseph?"

"I was in a mat-shed," said McGonigle. "I was walking out toward Deep Water Bay. Just landed from the Leng Shuen from Sydney, and stretching my legs when it came up. I couldn't find any other place to go."

"You were lucky," said Hempie. "That side of the island was hard hit."

"Yes, I was sort of lucky, I guess," said John Joseph. "In the middle of the blow the wind took the mat-shed and pushed it over the cliff. It landed upside down in the middle of the road, in pieces all around me."

"My ——" said Hempie. "And you're alive!"

"Of course, I'm alive. I bumped my elbow, and it took a —— long time to get the pieces of thatch out of my hair. Then I crawled under a rock by a nullah and waited for the blow to stop. It wasn't such a bad typhoon. You should see the Australian Bight in dirty weather. Here, have a lichee."

That was McGonigle.

Hempie took him back with us, and he was mess guest that night. Most of the men knew him already, and the others had heard of him. He was very popular, even when they found he was pro-Chinese—another anti-foreign strike was in the air, and feeling was bitter—and they pumped him with questions. What had he seen? Where had he been? What was he doing? They hadn't had news of him since the tobacco company, the firm he'd been with fifteen years, went under.

"Yes, it was pretty bad when the Inter-Ocean failed," he said. "It's hard for a fellow to get a new appointment this side of the Pacific, as you all know. You've got to be sent out."

"What did you do?"

"I was in Shanghai. I hunted positions

for six months, and finally I got hungry and shipped out on a Blue Funnel boat."

"As a common seaman?" asked a couple of Englishmen, in surprize.

"Able seaman was the classification, I believe," said John Joseph, grinning. "I was two years at sea. Had a great time. Then I got this job with the China Coast Export."

The Swedish consul was a mess guest that night.

"Look here," he said. "I remember some one telling me that you were on the Paak Shan when she was blown out of the Bay of Bengal and was off her course for sixty days."

"Yes," said McGonigle. "I was aboard."

"Did they run out of food and some die of starvation?"

"Only three," said McGonigle. "Or maybe four. No, I guess five, with the ship's carpenter. He was a little fellow."

"That was pretty bad, wasn't it?"

"Oh, it could have been worse. We had plenty of water."

"What did they do?" asked Hempie.

"The officers kept the men forward," said McGonigle. "And gave each man one biscuit and a shred of beef a day. We caught a few fish. I didn't like it much when the men began licking the masts, though."

"Licking the masts?"

"Sure. You know how many times the masts are grasped by hands? It makes the wood greasy in time. Well, they licked it."

Even the Swedish consul laughed at that, and he had been a long time in the Orient, but the fellows who knew McGonigle didn't.

"What else did they eat?" they said.

"Well," said McGonigle, "they picked the seams of the deck to pull out the tar, and ate that, and they chewed at their shoes. Then they began looking hard at one another. That's when it made me creepy to see them lick the masts—I'm a fat man. But I rolled up my sleeves and left them rolled, especially when I was asleep, and I could hear them walking around me on the deck and feel their eyes sizing up my muscles, and after that they didn't look too hard at me. Pretty soon we sighted the coast of Sumatra, and then we were all right."

That, as I say, was McGonigle.

The talk shifted, as every night it did nowadays, to the Chinese and their ways.

Hempie said they were devils; they'd stick a knife in your back rather than take chow. A fellow named Du Rande, whose import business was being run on the rocks because of impending strikes, said he'd like to have a few of their hides to tan. The Englishmen remarked that they were nothing but a kind of nigger anyway, and what did it matter if they were good or bad niggers? The Swedish consul would vouchsafe only the fact that we didn't understand them. But not John Joseph!

"The Chinese is a fine fellow!" he snorted. "He's an honest man. He's a gentleman. You don't want to understand him."

He turned to Du Rande.

"Do you know why they won't trade with you? Because you say, 'Chinaman, I am so big—'" he raised his hand above his head—"'and you are only so big.'" He lowered his hand to two feet above the floor. "Take the German traders; they go into the country and learn the language, and they say to the Chinese, 'I've got what you want, and you've got what I want, so let's each have something and be friends.'"

"But, my dear chap," said the Englishman, "we can't do that. We've got to keep up the supremacy of the white race."

"I've seen some white men I didn't think were so darned supreme," replied John Joseph. "And the Germans are getting your trade, aren't they? Aren't they?"

The Englishman said nothing, and looked glum but resolute.

"You say the Chinese is all right, do you? He's a gentleman?" Du Rande asked McGonigle. "What about the General on the Yangtze who cut off the arms and legs of his rival, and of his

rival's wife? What about the Manchus who killed a man by letting water drop slowly on his head—or giving him to the rats? What about crucifying defeated officers on the Bund of Canton?"

"I can tell one on the foreigner for every one against the Chinese," said McGonigle, and proceeded to do it, citing European history by the yard, and dwelling heavily on the Borgias and Medicis.

So they had it back and forth, Du Rande telling all the dirt he knew about the natives, and McGonigle, to prove his point, all he knew about the Occidentals, until any one would think the world was a maelstrom of treachery and devilment. The more gin-slings that were slung, the more excited the pair got, and the glasses hopped up and down like rubber balls from the beating of their fists on the table. At last—

"They may be pretty rough to prisoners of war," shouted McGonigle, "and they may be bad enemies and revengeful. I'll grant all that. But they keep their word. Let a Chinese say, 'Behold my friend,' and that man's his friend for the rest of his life, and nothing can change it."

"Oh ——," said Du Rande. "Look here. I have three hundred Hongkong dollars put aside to buy tickets on the Calcutta Sweep. Instead, I'll make a bet with you. I'll go with you into the interior for a month. I want to go anyway; I've never been. Away inside, off the beaten track, where we can see the son of this wonderful country of yours in his natural state, free from the foreigner's influence.

"And I'll lay that three hundred Hongkong against three hundred of yours, that if we get back with our lives we'll have witnessed at least one act of treachery so rotten it'll stink like a paddy field."

"And I'll go with you," declared McGonigle. "And I'll put my three hundred up that we'll not only see no act of treachery, but some one will go out of his way to do us a good deed greater than you would do for me or I for you."

"And my rotten act will be done in the name of friendship," said Du Rande. "Or under its guise."

"Sure," said McGonigle, "and so will my good deed. Now, when are we going?"

As neither of the men could get away at that season, and as the rivers were navigable only part way, the month was set for the late winter, after Chinese New Year, when the rains had started. McGonigle, who was going back to Shanghai that week, said he would write to set the date, as it would have to be some month when the firm was sending him south.

So the money was put up and the wager written down on paper and witnessed by all, with Hempie holding the stake. McGonigle, all one great grin, put his hand across the table and shook Du Rande's. We all rose in some uncertainty from the gin and went home under the swinging signs, through the dying wind and the streets that were pretty well cleared off by then. McGonigle went away with Du Rande, arm in arm, helping him down the stairs, for he was the best natured fellow in the world and the wildest argument might make him excited, but never mad.

We saw McGonigle off, the end of the week, all the mess going on board with him, and he spent the last dime of his expense account buying us drinks, saying that he'd have to distribute his shirts around as tips to the cabin boys when he got off the ship.

II

WE DIDN'T hear from him until the rains began. He wrote Du Rande, at last, that his firm would want him to go up the Pearl River, past Canton some hundreds of miles, and to the north, where the old walled town of Shaan Moon stood, the City of the Closed Door. It was a lacquer city, with which the China Coast Exporting Company did business but, owing to the activities of a bandit general there, they were unable to get their shipments down the river. The

company had asked McGonigle to go up and buy the bandit off. McGonigle wondered whether Du Rande could get away then.

Business was so slack with Du Rande's company that he could have been gone two months without so much as missing an order for a tile, so they set the time for the middle of March. The last we saw of Du Rande, then, was on the deck of the Fat Shan bound for Canton, where he was to meet McGonigle, who would go direct from Shanghai without transhipping at Hongkong.

"You'll have a thrilling time," said the mess, "for you're going with McGonigle. Wherever he goes —— pops." And they looked a bit envious, for it was dull in Hongkong just then.

Now the rest of the tale comes from Du Rande, and whether it's invented or gospel there's no way to tell. We've no proof but the report of a man in Shanghai, who says there were five marks on the face of McGonigle, and there's a scallop that could be made by a bullet in the lobe of Du Rande's ear. No other white man witnessed the affair, except the pill doctor, and where he went—but that's at the end of the story.

Du Rande sailed away with a kit full of a month's tin goods supplies and biscuit, and plenty of clothing for the mountain region of Shaan Moon, though no one could tell him what to take, for no one in Hongkong could be found who'd been to the place. And he carried a book with the edges of pages glued together and six hundred Hongkong notes hidden between the leaves; the stake, entrusted him by Hempie. For McGonigle would not be coming back to Hongkong, nor could we tell when he'd turn up again, and if he won he must be paid. Du Rande carried the notes this way because, though Chinese bandits have been known to take a man's purse and luggage and the clothes off his back, sending him home in newspapers, they've never been known to care for a book in a foreign language.

The Fatshan docked at the Bund of Canton the next dawn, in a hubbub of screaming cargo-coolies, and McGonigle came aboard. Together they transhipped their kits to a native craft that worked by a paddle-wheel which shifts of coolies churned, hour after hour, and made Du Rande think of the galley slaves of old. At the turn of the tide she sailed, and they moved past the Foreign Concession, past the grain markets and the Island of Unwanted Children, and they came to the clear water above the teeming city. There were no more floating vegetables or dead hogs or other miscellany.

They passed above the fish nets where sometimes the bodies of drowned sampan people are caught and can be seen tangled in the mesh forever, and they came into a place of quiet, with the hills coming down to meet the river, the banks of green lichee trees, the clumps of bamboo, a temple here and there in a sacred spot, and the villages huddled behind walls. Du Rande says it's a beautiful country, where the white man rarely goes, and he was ready to believe the race who came out of it ought to be all right, anyhow.

They lay in their bunks smoking and watching the brown beds of lotus unroll past the window, and John Joseph told Du Rande the story of the general he was going to hunt.

III

THERE was a triangle in Kwangsi, the next province to the west, formed by three river cities: Nan-ning, the left angle on the western tributary; Kwei Lin, the apex, on the northern stream; and Wu Chow, the angle on the right, a great city where the tributaries join. In that time the triangle was alternately ruled and ravished by a great bandit, self-styled general, and a true military genius.

His surname was Chan, which is common enough, but they called him "Yat Chan," which means "One Minute". Authorities of one kind or another, and rival generals, had hunted him for years; but always, when they had got so close they could say, "In one minute we will have him," in that minute he was gone.

His history was strange. It was said he had started life respectably enough as a student of medicine, but the temptations of a bandit's life had been too strong and he had thrown away his books, gathered together half the outlaws of the hills and made himself their chief. These rascals lived on the land and, though their legs were weary from forced marches, their bellies were full and their pockets jingling.

Chan Yat Chan had never forgotten his medicine. He was proud of it, and they said he would show off his knowledge from time to time, practising on his soldiers, binding their wounds, and curing them now of this, now that. This was the fellow, then, they hoped to find.

IV

THEY sailed north for thirty miles or so through a steep gorge, and came to the city of Wuchow where the rivers meet, and here they took a junk that drew less water, for the deep part of the river was past. And at Wuchow who should come aboard but another white man.

He was short, quick of movement as a bird, and his head was round, and bald as a shoe button. Jaffrey was his name, and he sold pills to the Chinese. Whole cases of them he carried with him, pills for the liver, for the kidneys, for dyspepsia, for headache. He was the agent for a firm in America—a patent medicine house—and it was amazing the trade he had in China.

All the boxes and the handbills and the newspaper advertisements were the same as in the States, except that they had pictures of a Chinese holding his stomach or his side, and the characters of China were substituted for the English letters. Every medicine had its label and the poisonous antiseptics were marked with black characters and death's heads.

Du Rande shyed off from him at first, not wishing to be too friendly—for intimacy would be forced enough and he wanted to size him up—but when the pill-man paid no attention to them at all, it piqued McGonigle, who approached him. He found that the newcomer also was going to Shaan Moon and that he knew something that they didn't.

"Coming from Kwei Lin," said this Jaffrey, "about a day downstream, we ran into Chinese troops. They had been marching overland and were crossing the river in sampans. They were traveling south and west, and the City of the Closed Door lay straight in their path, if they travelled far enough. Their uniforms were Cantonese and they carried the short-rayed sun on their banners, which means they were one time the troops of Sun Yat Sen. I think there will be a battle."

"Nobody knows that old One Minute is in Shaan Moon," said John Joseph. "And if he was, some one has warned him about this invasion and he has departed. It is always that way." And he sighed, wondering if he would have to chase the bandit over three provinces to get the concession of the river.

"I know where One Minute is," said the pill-dealer.

John Joseph and Du Rande stared at him.

"The —— you do," said McGonigle.

"The —— I don't. He's in Shaan Moon. I'm going to do business there with him—him and his army."

"Sell them pills?" Du Rande wanted to know.

"Sure," said Jaffrey. "Armies always need pills."

McGonigle poked about in the samples.

"I should think some of these would make grand bullets," he said.

But with that, Jaffrey shut the box as if it was a trap, and walked off in a huff, for he was very keen about his medicines.

"Let him alone," Du Rande told McGonigle. "I don't like his map."

But McGonigle could never bear to have hard feelings, and pursued the pill man to his side of the ship, and pretty soon had him appeased and playing rummy, with all the Chinese squatting around and looking over their shoulders.

The next day was the one they saw the abandoned junk.

They were playing rummy, as usual, when suddenly all the Chinese ran to one side of the ship and began chattering and nudging and clinging on to each other's shoulders. The Americans went, too, and there, coming crazily toward them was a painted river junk with her matting sails furled. She was high in the stern like a galleon of Spain, and she had huge eyes painted all over her prow. It was as if the eyes could see, for without any hand at her sweep she came straight at them, and missed them only because their own boat sheered suddenly off at right angles, with better seamanship than Du Rande would have given her credit for.

The Chinese were making a great hubbub, and McGonigle said they were saying this encounter was very "bad joss."

"They've had a battle," said Du Rande, pointing to the unmanned junk.

Sure enough, there were dead soldiers on her, a dozen lying scattered over the poop deck and under the furled sails.

"I guess I'll look into this," said McGonigle. "Tell them to put the junk about for me." And, the deck of the strange craft at that moment crossing their stern, the poop deck five or six feet below theirs, he jumped lightly overboard and landed in an empty basket on the abandoned ship.

"*Ai-yah!*" cried all the Chinese at once, horrified, and they wanted to make off immediately. Du Rande had to give the pilot ten dollars Hongkong to put the ship back and let McGonigle climb on board again, and after that not one Chinese would come near John Joseph, not even to see the rummy game. They said he had tempted the joss too far, and even being a fat man could not save him now. At the least they expected him to be hauled overboard by water-devils, and one old fellow set off a bunch of firecrackers to scare away demons, though not very hopefully.

Du Rande was irritated.

"What did you want to do a fool thing like that for?" he asked McGonigle.

"I wanted to see who they were," John Joseph said. "Or else to find out who killed them. If they were some of old Yat Chan's men we would have to look further up the river instead of in Shaan Moon."

"Well, were they?"

"No, their uniforms were too good. They belonged to a regular army, no bandit chief. Nor were they Cantonese troops. Some one had cut their insignia away, of course—they always do that—and I couldn't tell much about them."

"When I was in Kwei Lin," the pill-man said, "there was a rumor that Central Government troops from the north were in the hills, coming down to fight the Canton Kuomingtang by land. But no one knows."

"May be," said McGonigle. "In that case there are three armies around, and we ought to have fun enough. But whatever battle these boys were in, it didn't amount to anything. All hand to hand, for the boat hasn't a bullet hole. They have been dead for days. I turned a few over on their faces, and they were as black as buried duck eggs."

V

THE LAST stop the boat made was at a river mission. Beyond, there were rapids. Du Rande and McGonigle and Jaffrey disembarked to go to Shaan Moon on foot.

The missionary was a Scotsman, with a forehead like a Cheshire cheese, and he made them come in to the house and join in family prayers, and called on McGonigle to say grace at table. But after that was over they had a grand feed, and sat smoking around his *fung lo* half the night.

The missionary was worried, for he had five little girls all down with chicken-pox. He brought the men upstairs to see them, and McGonigle went crazy about the kids. He unearthed medicine from the pill man's boxes and dosed the sick ones, and to the convalescent ones he told stories, and he rocked them all in turn. Some of the poor kids were broken out, with great splotches over their faces.

The missionary said he would have been more alarmed, but he understood chicken-pox pretty well, and besides a medical missionary, who had a regular circuit in that part of the country, was due in two days, coming from Wu Chow to the City of the Closed Door.

So the next morning the three were on their way again. They followed an old road that was paved with long slabs of granite, placed side by side, and that was slippery enough in the early morning rain. It was a great country, all right. The land was rising toward the mountains and there were waterfalls among the pine trees. Now and then they came out into some paddy fields, where the farmers were ploughing with water buffalo, and they passed a lake with tall, white birds nesting in the rushes. After a while Du Rande said—

"I see people coming down the road."

There were people—a whole string of them—approaching single file, as the Chinese do, except when there were children trotting beside them, and here and there an old matron with bound feet had a girl supporting her. A few coolie chairs went by, with curtains drawn, and every one carried a bundle, even the children. They were trotting along, not running, and yet making good time, even the old ladies with bound feet.

McGonigle spoke to the first man and, though the fellow answered in up-country dialect, John Joseph managed to understand him to the extent that Chan Yat Chan was in the City of the Closed Door, and the armies of the south were surrounding him on the hills, and that many of the inhabitants were fleeing.

"Which they always do," McGonigle told Du Rande, "when there is trouble."

"Where do they go?"

"To neutral territory. Probably two hundred of them will go to that mission on the river, and every one of these Chinese kids will get chicken-pox."

All that day they passed people on the road, but none of the three had a thought of turning back, for it was the first chance any of them had had to see a Chinese battle at close range, and it was said to be amusing enough, with not too much bloodshed. Besides, John Joseph was pleased to know to a certainty where Chan Yat Chan could be found. At nightfall it was raining a little, and darker than the inside of a hollow Buddha, and the first thing, all three of them had fallen headlong in a trench.

A great lout of a soldier came running through the mud, and pointed his gun at Du Rande's head. It was a Mauser with a rifle stock, and looked as big as a howitzer to him, but McGonigle turned on his politest Cantonese, and when the soldier saw they were foreigners he stood with his mouth open and let the gun waggle in his hand. He was a soldier of the Kuomingtang, a Cantonese such as the pill man had said he had seen crossing the river in boats.

John Joseph explained that they were not concerned with warfare, but had business of a commercial nature with Chan Yat Chan, and wished to go through the lines into the City of the Closed Door.

The man replied that this was impossible. He and his comrades were surrounding the wicked bandit and no one should pass. He would fetch an officer to show how impossible it was. And while engaged in that errand, the three of them tested its impossibility by simply climbing the other side of the trench and hurrying on toward Shaan Moon. They climbed in and out of three more trenches, while no one was looking—which is easier than it sounds, for Chinese rarely fight after dark and expect nothing from the enemy—and presently a great wall loomed out of the rain above their heads.

It was so ancient that a sediment of earth had formed over it, but inside it was solid rock and mortar, and at all its angles it had turrets.

These turrets made the three of them extremely shy, for the Americans had an idea that they were full of sentries, so they skirted the wall at a distance of thirty yards, hoping the rain and the dark hid them, until they came to the main gate.

Here McGonigle went forward and

knocked gingerly, dreading a round of machine-gun fire in return. But no one came, and they were forced to wait for morning, lying in the sheltered side of a bamboo clump.

VI

WITH dawn the gates opened to let out the last string of refugees, and the three walked in, to be confronted by two dozen bandits who formed the outer guard.

They wore uniforms after a sort, any shape or color, and in fact the sole military insignia of some were spiral puttees, wound round and round their baggy *foo*.

"We are great *taipans* from America," said John Joseph, puffing with importance. "I, a merchant, give friendly greetings to the illustrious general and wish to make a little arrangement that will be advantageous to me, from the point of trade, and to him, from the point of the pocketbook."

His words were greeted with profoundest respect, and the messenger they sent must have enlarged upon his description, for in a few minutes he came running back to take them to his royal highness, Chan Yat Chan.

Shaan Moon is so ancient a city that historians have lost track of it. The streets were covered, like tunnels, and no more than two men could walk abreast on them. There was a granite statue, inside the gates, that the rains had washed almost into oblivion, but the gaunt features that remained of it were those of a Caucasian.

In the center of the town was an abandoned temple that covered, with its adjoining shrines, an acre of ground. Its swinging doors were carved bronze. Six soldiers lounged before them, three on a side, and a strange banner, with a gray disk on a blue ground, floated in the air above the doors.

The Americans walked under the flag, between the six men, and though McGonigle walked last, all eyes were on him, for he was a fat man and to be admired.

The bronze doors parted in the middle and let them through. They were in the

central room of the temple, which Chan Yat Chan had commandeered, as the largest building in the town, and suitable to be a barracks. The altar still stood at the back of the room, but its lights were extinguished. A few bronze images squatted against the wall, smeared with the red drippings of candles that had sputtered out long ago. A kerosene lamp was lighted in a stone lantern that swung from the ceiling, and below the lantern, at a long bare table where officers were spreading out maps and diagrams, sat Chan Yat Chan, the general, the bandit, the doctor, the "Man of One Minute."

He was a little man, smaller even than the pill vendor, and thin, though one would think that he would have fattened from the pickings of the country. On his forehead he wore square spectacles that were rimmed with steel. He was swallowed up in a high blackwood chair, and to guard him against the cold he wore many successive layers of padded chams, over the top of which his head appeared, the color and shape and texture of a walnut.

The pill vendor, Jaffrey, stood first before the bandit, and the square spectacles surveyed him.

"Who are you?" demanded Chan Yat Chan in the staccato accent of the hill villages.

The pill doctor gave him his card, on the back of which his name and occupation were printed in Chinese.

"And these gentlemen," he said, pointing to Du Rande and John Joseph. "These are my friends."

"He calls us his friends." Du Rande nudged McGonigle. "That may be poor advertising. We know nothing about him."

But the general's eyes went past Jaffrey and Du Rande to John Joseph and lingered there a long time.

"Who," he asked finally, "is the one who had business with my pocketbook?"

"I," said John Joseph, and stepping forward gave his name and bowed very low, from the waist. He stated his case—how the China Coast Exporting Company desired the lacquerware from Shaan Moon; how, due to the activities of Chan's men, the lacquer merchants feared the risk of transporting it to the river; how, once on the river, if it had escaped the notice of his bandits on land, it fell into the hands of his pirates on the water. Therefore, John Joseph concluded, the company had sent him to negotiate, promising either to pay a tax per shipment, or lump sum quarterly, for the privilege of carrying the flag with the gray disk on the field of blue. This, upon their shipments, would indicate the protection of Chan Yat Chan.

"Ah, yes," the general understood. He sat back in his chair, his glances like mice running up and down John Joseph—up and down.

"The amount of the tax," he announced at last, "will have to be deliberated. If a decision is reached in a day or two, will the *sin shaang* be prepared to make the initial payment on the spot?"

"*Tso mut ye?*" cried John Joseph. "Am I so great a fool as to carry that sum into the bandit country?"

Jaffrey gasped at this impudence. The general made no sign, displeased or otherwise, but a faint flicker crossed his face, like the reflection from candle light.

"Moreover, if in an evil hour you should be so unfortunate as to be defeated, of what avail to pay a tax?"

And here McGonigle grinned a wide Irish grin, and the walnut face of Chan Yat Chan wrinkled more and more, until at last, before his officers and all his men, he himself was grinning in a most unmilitary manner.

"No, I have come to negotiate, no more. And I have ventured through the Canton lines, and into the City of the Closed Door at this hazardous time, only because report made it certain that I would find you here. And being known through three provinces as the Man of One Minute, to find you anywhere is a feat."

The general rose from his carved chair, bowed grave acknowledgment of the compliment, and sat again.

So McGonigle went on. He suggested that, despite the troublesome times, negotiations be continued under the assumption that Chan Yat Chan would be victorious, and if the southern troops withdrew and the tax were not too high, the payments would begin the first of the second month following. But as he talked, the general's attention wavered—not from John Joseph but from the subject in hand—and his eyes skipped from McGonigle's arm muscles to the calves of his legs, then to his shoulders, and back again.

And as the American was in the midst of a computation of the tax upon ten gross of lacquer sweetmeat trays, the bandit, unobtrusively, so as not to interrupt, motioned to a soldier, who produced a string, gently passed it around the biceps of the speaker, made a loop to indicate the girth, and gave it to his superior.

The officers and men kept their distance, but craned their necks to look at the loop.

"*Ho taai*," they whispered among themselves. "*Sai yan ho taai*." The man from the west, the foreigner, was very large.

McGonigle stopped helplessly, sensing that, although every one waited politely, attention to what he was saying had ceased.

Chan Yat Chan stood up.

"In my life I have seen few men from the west, but those few have been large. They are taller and broader than the men from the Middle Kingdom.* Why is this?"

"Indeed," said McGonigle, "I don't know, unless it's because at home the air is dry and sharp instead of humid and soft, as here, and that gives us a great appetite. And the more we eat the more we grow."

All the bandits laughed at that.

"Alas then," said Chan, "it is better for the Chinese that his climate is soft. For the greater his appetite here, the hungrier he remains."

He left his maps and diagrams and stood beside John Joseph. And as the table boys used to do, he touched the solid flesh, curiously.

"Are there other men from the west as great as yourself, *sin shaang*?"

"I suppose," said McGonigle, "that I am larger than the average."

"I had thought so." He nodded with satisfaction; then he paused.

"Ah, *sin shaang*, what a soldier you would make! In your land you are great among many, and I am great among many in these mountains. There would be a noble alliance." He sighed somewhat bitterly.

McGonigle recalled that in Canton men had said there was neither son nor right hand lieutenant to carry on this bandit's standard, but that he fought alone, making his own schemes.

"But I can see that it would be impossible to persuade you from your present profession. Is it not so? Well, we can be friends at least, for I admire you very much."

"Sure," said McGonigle, embarrassed, quixotically sorry for the melancholy robber. "I mean, *shi pit*. We can be friends. We'll be good friends."

"Then appear tomorrow at this temple, at the fifth hour below noon, and we will eat rice together, discussing among other things the trivial matter of the tax."

"It is much too great an honor," replied McGonigle, bowing acceptance.

Then, with a contemptuous permission to Jaffrey to dispense his medicines, the interview was ended. And as the visitors marched away Chan Yat Chan followed them sadly with his eye.

The three Americans found a smelly but habitable Chinese inn and removed there to await the morrow.

VII

HOWEVER, the next day McGonigle awoke with a headache that was like the thrust of a knife. Du Rande dosed him with headache tablets, but it did no good, and late in the afternoon he began to complain, first of a chill and then of a fever. Before five a messenger came

*China.

from Chan Yat Chan saying the general had arrived at a decision concerning the rate of the tax. Would the *sin shaang* present himself at the barracks forthwith?

"——," groaned McGonigle, holding his head in his hands, "I couldn't walk across the street tonight, let alone to the other side of town. We all may be stabbed in consequence, for *lese majesté*, but I will have to tell the messenger that I am ill and cannot see the general."

This he did.

No more time had elapsed than would have taken the messenger to deliver his word and return, than a scurrying was heard in the hotel corridors and the streets. Du Rande went to the window and reported that a procession was coming toward the inn.

"Sure," said McGonigle. "It's the executioner, for us."

"It's the general," said Du Rande, "and he's coming in."

"Maybe he attends to such little unpleasantnesses himself," said McGonigle, and the pill doctor complained bitterly that John Joseph had not gone when ordered, headache or not.

They were not to be executed, however. For the general, walking into the room, surrounded by the solid square of his bodyguard, stood before the bed boards on which John Joseph lay and announced that, word having been brought of the illness of his American friend, he, a man of many pursuits and professions, and foremost of all a doctor, had come to cure him.

Du Rande could see in McGonigle's eye that next to being executed he dreaded being doctored by a Chinese physician, but the sick man mustered up courage and asked for a diagnosis.

"You have a bad headache?" Chan asked. "More severe than ever before in your life, you say?"

"*Hai*," said McGonigle. "It is terrible."

The general felt John Joseph's face and head, and ordered the soldiers to strip him, although the room was cold as Siberia. Then he touched his skin again, all over, though gingerly, looking at it so closely that his eyelids all but touched the hair on McGonigle's chest. At last he straightened up.

"It is too early to discover yet," he said. "But alas, it bears the symptons of—" and here he spoke a word that no one of the three men could understand, saying it very gravely, sucking and hissing, which is the polite way of expressing commiseration in China.

"Whatever can that be?" John Joseph asked the pill doctor, and he told Chan regretfully that he did not understand.

Chan had washed his hands carefully in a bowl of ointment. He repeated the word, touching his own arm in several places with the tip of his finger, as if to demonstrate.

"I think," said the pill doctor, "he is telling you that you have chicken-pox."

"Sure, that's what it is," McGonigle cried, relieved. "I caught it from the kids at the mission. Pretty clever to diagnose it, isn't he?" And he looked at the general admiringly.

"I will be back in the morning to make certain," said Chan Yat Chan. "But in the meantime you must take the initial treatment, for if I am right we must lose no time." And signalling to two of his men who carried between them a black box, he opened it and mixed an even blacker draught from various vials and powders inside.

"Good ——!" McGonigle groaned, seeing it, and thinking of the brews the Chinese doctors were reputed to make of ground land crabs and bones of dog, peacock feathers and mercury, frogs' eyes and mud from the Yangtze.

"Drink it," advised the pill doctor, "or he will be offended."

John Joseph commended his soul to heaven, closed his eyes, and drank.

"Sure, it didn't taste like anything at all," he said, after a bit, the general and his retinue having withdrawn. "Even water had more taste than that. I hope I'm not poisoned for the sake of a little thing like chicken-pox. But what a head I have! It feels like a temple drum. Those mission kids must have suffered."

Du Rande was not optimistic.

"Was it actually chicken-pox that he meant? Of course you haven't, but he didn't by chance imagine you had—smallpox?"

"It wasn't the word for smallpox that he said. And I haven't got that, glory be, for I've been recently vaccinated."

"I've heard of Chinese bandits all my life," said Du Rande, "But I've never heard of one who toted a medicine kit around, nor who wouldn't rather see you dying than convalescing."

McGonigle laughed. He was interested in the world despite his pain.

"This is a funny country. I don't understand it at all and never will; nor will you, my lad." And the pain gripping him, then, he shut his eyes.

Du Rande subsided, depressed by John Joseph's illness and worrying over the strange things. Why had old One Minute not beaten it into the hills at the first sign of the Canton army, as he had always done before? What was the meaning of that junk-load of dead soldiers? Who were they? Why was Chan taking the trouble to pump McGonigle full of black medicine—Chan the bandit?

"And we expected to be robbed!" he murmured aloud. "The pains Hempie took to glue the stake of the wager into the book."

"Did you make a wager?" asked the pill man.

"Yes," said Du Rande. "And it looks —— childish now. But we were all drunk at the time."

And he told him of the night after the typhoon, and showed him the book where the Hongkong notes were stuck between the leaves. He was glad now that they had met this Jaffrey at Wu Chow. He was some one to talk to. He would have been half crazy alone, with McGonigle sick on his hands.

They looked at McGonigle presently, and found him sound asleep. His pulse was rapid and his temperature a bit high, but they decided a sleeping draught was all that had been given him, and Jaffrey then picked up his cases and went out to sell a couple of quarts of pills to the soldiers. He never lost the chance to make a penny, that fellow.

However, the next morning John Joseph had such a fever that he could recognize no one. At nine, Chan Yat Chan, with his bodyguard and his medicine case, arrived and gave him another dose of the mixture, and issued orders. The fat *sin shaang* must be removed at once to a loft above the barracks.

Du Rande, with Jaffrey for interpreter, demanded the reason.

"The innkeeper will not permit him to remain," replied the general. "Besides, for the important treatment which I shall give him, it is necessary that he be near me. For I am a general as well as a doctor, and there is an army around me. I am occupied with military affairs and can not cross the city to administer medicine.

So over the protest of Du Rande they bore John Joseph away.

"And now," asked Du Rande in despair, turning to Jaffrey, "What can I do? They will kill him with their doses. Can we go back through the Cantonese lines to the mission and find if the medical missionary has come there yet? And bring him here?"

But Jaffrey said that was impossible, and refused, and Du Rande, speaking few words of dialect, knew he could never find the way alone, so perforce stayed.

It was hard on him. He tramped the floor of his mean room at the inn and cursed the night of the wager and wondered whether McGonigle would die. At last, at eleven, when Jaffrey went out to sell some more of his beastly pills, he could stand it no more and went, uninvited, to the temple that was now a barracks.

He could see he was unwelcome and the officers were half of a mind to shoot rather than tolerate him around. The table under the lantern was still covered with maps and drawings, and the officers grouped around it as before. The general was not there.

There were men squatting about, beside the wall, and Du Rande approached and argued, but they only laughed, not understanding him. At last, one, with a pained expression, took him by the sleeve and pointed to the ladder, and climbing this Du Rande found a loft, deserted and dusty, with one small room set apart and locked.

The door to it was grilled, and looking through he could see John Joseph lying upon bed boards, with old *min tois* that had been spread over him to keep him warm, tossed aside in his delirium. He was alive, assuredly, but very sick.

Du Rande beat at the grill in vain, and after awhile a servant came behind him and with gestures informed him that it was no use; order had been given that no one was to enter except Chan Yat Chan.

So, going miserably in search of the general, Du Rande returned. He crossed the city again, past the market place where the pigs were piled in casks, and geese hissed, and customers went back and forth, with pieces of meat and a few vegetables tied at the end of a string—for men must eat despite war—and as he drew near the granite statue there was a roar and the crack of rifles, and a shell, a dud, came slithering through the top of the ancient wall and lodged in a heap of refuse beside him.

A bullet from somewhere stung the lobe of his ear. The battle had begun.

VIII

THE City of the Closed Door, fortunately for the defenders, stood not in a valley, but on the highest of the hills in the vicinity. Nevertheless the Canton troops, occupying the surrounding highlands, could inflict considerable damage to the wall with machine-gun fire, and if they could not direct the rain of bullets into the city, they were able to move the heavy pieces into such a position that shells would clear the walls and fall upon the town.

But the field pieces were few and the aim of the gunners not precise, and of the shells that did not bury their noses in the hill or sail completely over the city more than three-quarters were duds. Still there came, now and then, a slim projectile of death, that not only found a mark, but exploded. The crash would shake the city, a cloud of dust would settle, and the street would fill with fleeing Chinese. Sometimes Du Rande could hear groans in the débris.

Meanwhile the soldiers of Chan Yat Chan came filing out from the various courtyards and inns and temples where they had been quartered, single-file and not to be hurried, each with his blanket-roll, his cartridge belt and his rifle, each uniform nondescript and tattered but still bearing some semblance to the military. They moved to appointed places along the turreted wall, or climbed the higher buildings, where some lay behind their rifles and others set up battered but workable machine-guns.

The noise and the activity, his inability to find the general, his doubt as to what he could say when he did find him, the memory of McGonigle lying untended in that grilled room, unnerved Du Rande, and coming across Jaffrey emerging from an apothecary's, upon whom he had been able to unload a good supply of pills, he fell on him with joy.

Jaffrey, however, was unmoved. A funny little man, Du Rande thought, moving about in the confusion, intent on his own business, neither smiling nor frowning, bobbing this way and that like a cork, yet raking in twenty-cent pieces all the time. Callous too, for he said that McGonigle would be all right; they had only segregated him so that he would not give chicken-pox, or whatever it was, to the army at this unpropitious time.

Having to be content with that, Du Rande went back to the inn with him, where together they moved their luggage from the top of the house to the cellar, against the possible advent of a shell.

The battle continued for four days, and an eastern section of the wall was so smashed by machine-guns that a battlement was knocked off and a breach near

the top made, through which rifle bullets came in a steady stream. But the houses in the part of the town within this range being speedily deserted, Shaan Moon suffered little loss of life, and retaliated by demolishing with well-directed sniping, the crews of two guns, so that large shells that entered the city were fewer even than hitherto.

John Joseph's fever went on. Du Rande visited him—through the grilled window—endlessly coming and going so many times, during the days, that the officers downstairs who had endured his presence, now made menacing gestures, and he decided to camp in the loft without leaving until the general should put in appearance. He knew Yat Chan came every day, for there were evidences of food and water and some sort of care, but he was never able to catch his man.

And so, by sheer waiting, at last he was rewarded by the customary tumult in the temple yard that announced the presence of Chan Yat Chan.

Du Rande peered over the rail of the loft. Telescope in hand, the little general entered the temple, his bodyguard tramping stolidly along with him. The officers stood at attention and he gave orders right and left. Presently there came a stream of people to see him—soldiers, scouts, merchants—and over a bowl of tea he interviewed them.

At last, business finished, he mounted the stairs, medicine case in hand, two of his bodyguard in tow. He brushed by Du Rande as if he were a piece of furniture and entered the sick room alone. Protesting, trying to follow, Du Rande was seized by the soldiers and held outside.

Through the grill he watched the general. Yat Chan tucked his sleeves high to the armpits before drawing near the bed. In all his actions he was careful that his garments touched none of John Joseph's. First he administered the black draught, which Du Rande was convinced must contain fever-bringing herbs. Then, stripping the man, he touched his skin in every part, examining the flesh minutely.

The soldiers in the corridor stood with mouths agape, registering proper awe. Was there a hint of ostentation in the general's gestures? The pleased consciousness of an audience?

John Joseph lay still as death now. Either the fever had reached its height or it had passed the enduring point and killed him. The general held a candle in his left hand and its light fell with ghostly glow over the naked body of the American. At last, traveling upward from feet to neck, the candle paused at McGonigle's chin. The general bent motionless for some minutes. The distance from where Du Rande stood was four yards, but he fancied he could detect three or four reddish patches rising on the edge of his friend's jawbone, running from chin to jowl. Chan straightened, and on his impassive countenance Du Rande detected a suggestion of satisfaction.

He clothed John Joseph and covered him warmly. He wrung out a cloth in some lemon-colored solution and laid it on McGonigle's chin. Then, very thoroughly he washed his hands and arms in ointment, pulled down his sleeves, and departed, locking the door after him.

Passing Du Rande he remarked, over his shoulder—

"*Tsz goh yat, ho faan.*"

There was a little swagger in his walk. Even in the scarcely sedate business of the ladder he seemed to swagger.

"*Tsz goh yat,*" repeated Du Rande, stringing together his brief knowledge of south Chinese. "Four piece days. *Ho faan*—come back good, or something of the sort. In four days he will get well."

IX

"I AM A lost man," said Chan Yat Chan without emotion.

This was on the morning of the fourth day after the crisis of the illness, the eighth day of the battle. Du Rande had been permitted to visit his friend. McGonigle was conscious now and in no pain, good-natured as ever, but weak as

water. The general had crept up the stairs like a cat, and entered the room.

"May ten thousand devils fly away with the Kuomingtang," protested McGonigle politely, "Before my great benefactor is harmed by a pin prick from them."

They faced each other across the bed, Yat Chan standing at the foot, McGonigle half lying, half sitting at the head, braced with the coats and *min tois* Du Rande had piled behind him, and mustering his old grin, though it was a sickish grin enough. Whether he had got well because of, or in spite of, the general, he could not tell, but it did not matter. Here he was and life was good.

"Benefactor?" repeated the general. "Ah, well. To one who has the proper knowledge, these matters present not too difficult a face." He puffed slightly. "When in my youth I was a student of medicine, there were those who predicted shining things. But now—" in his dilemma he deflated—"there is another matter."

Du Rande could only gather bits of their conversation, but John Joseph told it to him afterward, and it ran about as follows:

"Listen to me," went on Chan Yat Chan. "I am an old man. I have spent my life like a frog jumping from lily pad to lily pad, escaping the bill of the heron. For years the soldiers of the Manchus—the vile intruders—sought me. When the revolution sent those scurrying back to the plains behind the Forbidden City, the gray troops of Sun Yat Sen came upon me hunting me here, there, among the hills, but always—as you have learned—a minute too late.

"And when Sun was dead and the political party of the south divided, now came the left wing of the Kuomingtang, thirsting for my blood, and now the right.

"Now came an independent general from far in the province, jealous of my control, and once even the Yunnan mercenaries—though they are now dead—the hardest of all to outwit, for like me they were mountaineers.

"And why did they seek me? A man must live. Were not the Manchus torturers and oppressors? Have not the Kuomingtang despoiled temples and burned out Cantonese merchants? Must not river boats pay toll to five generals of the Kwantung province or their goods be seized?"

"Ah yes, it is true," said McGonigle.

"But I, who occasionally appropriate a small cargo, in order to feed and pay my soldiers, or imprison a squealing merchant for a ransom, am persecuted alike by government and outlaw."

"Pathetic, pathetic," murmured John Joseph, and drew in his breath politely, through his teeth.

"But now, alas, comes the worst of all!" Chan went on. "Never was a man of my years so harassed. A deplorable lack of consideration for gray hairs. Indeed, I am at the end of my resources. There are no more lichees in the catty. For those —— of Canton, hammering away at a certain section of the wall, are surely at the point of breaking it down. They have now opened so large a breach that the very best roof, where I had stationed snipers, is revealed to their nefarious aim.

"No sooner do I place a soldier on it than they shoot him. It is becoming difficult to persuade any more soldiers to die for me. Some of my most skilful snipers have disappeared for the time being."

"But it is not essential for you to hold this city," said McGonigle. "Why have you not fled long ago, according to your custom? Even now it can not be too late. Although the Cantonese Kuomingtang surround Shaan Moon, they mass always toward the south, to protect their lines of communication. Can you not break through to the north, with slight skirmishing and loss of men?"

"Ah, but that is the difficulty," replied the general. "Long ago, but for that, I would have departed. Long before the Cantonese had approached, let alone surrounded the city! To the north mass troops of Wu Pei Fu."

"Northern soldiers in the province of Kwangsi?" McGonigle cried, and sat bolt upright, forgetful of his illness. He fell back exhausted. "Then the rumor was true and the soldiers of the junk were from beyond Shanghai." And he proceeded to tell what Jaffrey had heard at Kwei Lin, and of the dead on the river boat.

"It is strange they were slain," said Chan. "No report of the meeting of the two armies has come to me. In fact I had assured myself that until today the Cantonese were not aware of the presence of the northerners."

"And why today?"

"Perhaps a reason for my name, the Man of One Minute," replied Chan Yat Chan in slight digression, "is that I possess a very strong telescope, the property one time of a traveler whom I detained for a small ransom and who had the misfortune to die before it arrived. These glasses have been always of the greatest assistance to me in detecting the movements of the enemy.

"And now, knowing from scouts that the northern troops have been for some weeks in the province, every day since Shaan Moon was surrounded I, at the top of the Three Flower Pagoda, have not only directed the resistance of the villainous Kuomingtang who assail me, but striven to keep in touch with the movements of the northern soldiers also.

"Always I have seen them on the distant horizon, moving to the left, to the right, no bigger than cockroach eggs. But today, alas, I look from my perch, and behold, they are as large as cockroaches themselves! There is no doubt but that the Cantonese have seen them by this time. Now, here am I, an old man, between two armies. What is to be done?"

"Why do you come to me?" asked McGonigle, rolling over with a sigh at the exertion of so much talking. "You are a soldier and I am only a man of business."

"*Hai*," replied Chan. "But you are a foreigner. And I learn that the ways of the foreigner in warfare are miraculous. He fights a million men against a million, with machines that go under the sea and in the air. His strategy is great beyond belief. Tell me, then, a little of the American's strategy."

John Joseph held his head in his hands.

"Get me a little rice wine," he said, and when it was brought to him he drank it, and lay back in thought.

At last he said—

"The Northern troops from Wu Pie Fu have come down to seek a battle with the Kuomingtang, is it not so?"

"Assuredly," said Chan. "Each aspires control of China. That is common talk, even in the hills."

"It is very simple, then. You must send to the generals of the Kuomingtang and say that, in return for full pardon for your—er—mode of livelihood, you will join ranks with them and give your troops to Canton against the army of the North."

"Will they grant such a request? When they have me at their mercy will they not rather slay me?"

"You and your men are mountaineers. Who would make better allies than those who know the country?"

The general thought.

"I shall have to fight a battle not of my making. And at the end of it there will be no temples to pillage, nor towns to sack—no taxes to collect. I shall be no longer my own master, but only a hireling."

"I see no other way. You should give a banquet and invite the commanding officers, and there discuss ways and means."

"Oh, a banquet?" said Chan, brightening a little. "Well, what must be must be. To the mouse pursued by the hawk, even the snake hole is welcome. Will you preside? My Cantonese savors strongly of hill dialect and the *sin shaang's* is perfect. Besides, it is more polite if a disinterested party bring two enemies together. Since the *sin shaang's* health is not quite returned, I will have a blackwood couch brought in to the table and he may be carried there and rest throughout the negotiations."

X

IT WAS a great feast they had. It was called that evening, for though the men of Wu Pei Fu were still, as seen through the telescope, no longer larger than cockroaches, there was no telling what proportions they might assume on the morrow.

Five black tables, inlaid heavily with mother of pearl and painted with flowers, were carried into the main room of the temple and laid end to end to accommodate the guests. Cooks were summoned from the inn and seized bodily from the kitchens of wealthy Shaan Moon merchants to prepare the banquet.

Rows of *fung los*—portable stoves—were set up in the outbuildings, and covered pots began to simmer early in the afternoon, sending up aromatic forecasts of the delicacies to come. There was great slaughter in the market place, of chickens and geese and hogs.

The shelling of the city having stopped, the people had emerged from their barricaded homes and all was bustle again.

Early that morning Chan Yat Chan had dispatched his messenger with the plea for parley and the tentative promise of help against the northern troops. Late that morning the answer had come.

The three generals of the Kuomingtang, accompanied by thirty officers, would convene with him at the temple at the sixth hour below noon. But for safeguard, five hundred Cantonese soldiers must be allowed inside the city wall, and the gates left open to summon others in case of attack.

To this, Chan Yat Chan, expressing pain at the lack of confidence, assented, but with the counter condition that the five hundred be allowed no nearer the barracks than inside the walls, where they would be ranked on the east side, and his own soldiery to take a place equally distant on the west wall, and there await the outcome.

"And this to be done," he continued nobly, "only because, among common soldiers, if they are quartered in too close proximity, street fighting may break out. But among those of high rank and honor like ourselves, there is no treachery to fear."

Therefore, at the sixth hour after noon, when dusk was falling and a weak, new moon was struggling through the rain, they came, one after one, the three generals of the Kuomingtang, through the city gates, and around the granite statue, to the one-time temple, and with them thirty officers and five hundred men. The men took a position along the eastern wall, and Chan Yat Chan's men filed from the barracks and stood at the west, but the officers went into the temple.

There to receive them stood Chan Yat Chan, in a brocaded robe, and with him fifteen officers. The room was hazy with incense and the smoke of lamps. From the back came the smell of cooking, enough to make quiver the nostrils of the Cantonese, confined to army rations for several months, and to lave the mouths of the street beggars, prostrate with their baskets, before the doors. The long table lay spread in front of the dead altar.

One by one the officers entered, and Chan Yat Chan bowed low before each, and led him to a place at the board. McGonigle reclined at a blackwood couch at the head, and was presented as intermediary. John Joseph was pale but grinning.

"I've been many things," he confided to Du Rande, standing behind him, "but never the League of Nations before."

The food was brought on, in covered bowls, a course at a time, and Du Rande said you should have seen the faces of the Kuomingtang above their porcelain soup spoons and their chop sticks.

There was sharks' fins soup, and soup of the yellow-jawed eel, and soup of the white mushroom, and soup of the nests of certain birds. There were chicken-and-walnuts and crabs with mein and dove eggs with red seed. There were great shrimps fried in their shells and whole boiled fish and the brown rolled

skins of ducks, with wafers. There were rice birds and boiled turtle and ducks cooked with orange skins. All this was washed down with rice wine and tea and partaken amid great interchange of compliments.

At a hiatus in the dinner—

"Behold my American friend," said Chan Yat Chan to the visiting delegation. "I have just cured him of an illness most malignant."

And John Joseph, grinning on his couch, made as good a speech as he could, vouching for the new alliance and beseeching the Kuomingtang to cement it. The visiting generals also spoke, and in return for control of the bandit army they promised immunity to Chan Yat Chan and vowed destruction upon the wicked northern troops.

All seemed well. The wine flowed freely, the diners hiccoughed in mild indigestion and Chan Yat Chan moved from guest to guest, conversing, deprecating, bowing, and saying now to McGonigle, now to one of his own officers, as he presented his guests.

"Behold my friend, the Colonel Kwong of Canton," or "Behold my friend, the Kuomingtang general of the left wing."

The night grew late, the new moon died behind the Three Flower Pagoda, and the rain increased. Some of the guests were growing very drunk.

A servant in a faded *cham* came from behind the seat of Chan Yat Chan and laid a fresh bowl of tea, clumsily before him. Du Rande recognized him as a former member of Chan's bodyguard, disguised as a waiter. Chan was sitting beside McGonigle at the moment and John Joseph could catch the words.

"Highness," he said, "now that the gates are opened and visitors allowed to pass, a scout has come in from the hills. He tells that a pestilence has fallen on the ranks of the northerners. Half those who fight under the banner of Wu Pei Fu are stricken. The northern army will advance no farther."

"See to the mango punch," said Chan to him loudly, "and order the cooks to serve it thus and so." And he launched into details of its preparation, his voice sinking lower and lower. "Who knows this tale?" he hissed at last to the servant.

"No one, I think," the servant replied. "The scout has ridden a pony all day and evening to carry the news."

"They will not come," the general repeated to himself over again. "They will not come. I am no longer between armies." And to the servant he whispered so low that even McGonigle could not hear, but he caught the words "*i shaang*"—cure-body—or doctor, and thought the pill doctor must be referred to.

It was late when the mango punch was served, the last course of the banquet, prepared with difficulty from out of season mangoes ripened prematurely in French Indo-China, a delicacy the general had treasured greatly.

It was served in bowls of the rice pattern, and Du Rande saw that though the bowls of the bandits and those for McGonigle and himself were old and cracked, those of the visitors were new, a mark of courtesy.

"Delicious," said the principal general of the Kuomingtang, sipping the dainty.

"Delicious!" cried one and all.

Two or three men, after the end of the dinner, retired to benches in the corners, to smoke opium. The rain poured on outside, and the wind rose a little.

"It is a bad night outside," said a Cantonese officer, tucking his hands into the sleeves of his *cham*. "Ten thousand spirits are abroad at such a time."

"I wish the feast would end," said McGonigle, weary and weak from excitement.

Another soldier in the guise of a servant, entered, spoke to the general, and glided away with an order.

"Look," whispered Du Rande to John Joseph. "The guests are falling asleep."

Two officers from Canton lay forward, faces upon the table. A third, in the act of conversing with Chan Yat Chan, was suddenly silent and sat back motionless, his open eyes glazing slowly.

From the end of the table came a cry of agony and an officer spun convulsively round and round and fell in the dust.

The commanding general from Canton, seeing his men thus cut down, sprang to his feet in fear and rage, giving a hoarse command. A peculiar expression distorted his face. He gripped his abdomen with both hands, digging his fingers into the flesh, as if the lesser hurt would soften the greater, sank down and died.

The soldiers of Chan Yat Chan remained unmoved.

"Poisoned," said Du Rande stupidly. "He poisoned them. And he called them his friends. He presented them as his friends."

"The new bowls and the old," said McGonigle. "Do you remember? The new bowls were for the dead. We're better out of this."

A hand clutched his coat. He turned and found Jaffrey, the pill vendor, at his side.

"My boxes have been broken into, and the poisons taken," he said. "Fifteen minutes ago I returned to the inn and found them so. Every vial with the black characters and the death's head has disappeared. We must go as quickly as we can, away from Shaan Moon. I have packed our luggage and have bearers waiting. Come."

One by one, like ghosts, the officers of Chan Yat Chan had risen, stepped over the thirty-three dead, and melted through the rear door of the one-time temple. The Man of One Minute had vanished. The lamps, burning their last bit of oil, shone only on the despoiled banquet table around which dead men sat, on the images in niches of the walls, and on the three Americans.

With Du Rande helping him, McGonigle staggered through the rear door, toward the kitchens, where the chair-coolies waited, and Jaffrey followed.

"We must bear toward the West Gate," said McGonigle. "Chan's men were drawn up there. The last command to the servant, no doubt, was that they begin withdrawing from the town. That is the direction he will take himself. At the east gate we would encounter the Kuomingtang. Make your coolies keep up with mine and all stay close together. And hurry, or we are done for."

Within the coolie-chairs it was damp and mouldy, but the canvas curtains kept out the driving rain. The feet of the coolies, trotting, made gentle thuds in the mud. The night concealed almost every object around them, but three hundred yards from the West Gate they caught up with the stragglers of Chan's army, gliding toward the wall.

The ground rose here, and looking back they could see, where occasional lights fought the rain, a partial panorama of the town. At the east end, warming themselves at fires, the soldiers of the Kuomingtang were moving to and fro, waiting restlessly for their officers.

"In ten minutes we may be too late," said McGonigle.

The coolies stopped and rested their chairs, huddling under their haystack raincoats, the water falling in streams off their spreading hats. Du Rande thought they were being held up, but it was only a slight congestion of departing bandits at the gates. The men picked up their chairs.

The Americans were over the rise and could not see the city now, but their ears strained for a shout or shot to indicate that the poisoning had been discovered. Then, for a moment, the sound of rain no longer smote the tops of the chairs. They were actually passing through the wall, between the gates.

"Follow the soldiers," said McGonigle to the bearer in front.

The country was deserted, with here and there an abandoned trench, a heap of sandbags, or a dead Cantonese.

"The bandits are picking a path in the sector from which the five hundred Kuo-Ming Tang were drawn," thought McGonigle. "Nothing was hidden from the eyes of Chan Yat Chan."

Night and distance combined to blot out slowly behind them the City of the Closed Door.

XI

IN THE morning the rain and the soldiers had disappeared. Before them stretched the paved path that led back to the river. The farmers were still plowing with water-buffalo and the scene was a long way removed from siege and violence.

McGonigle and Du Rande had pitched a rough camp on the sheltered side of a bamboo grove; Jaffrey, further inside and out of sight. In this way they had spent the latter part of the night.

Despite the peace of the spot the memory of the temple and the poisoned corpses still sickened them.

Said Du Rande:

"I've had enough of this country and these fine gentlemen you talk about. Let a Chinese say, 'Behold my friend,' and that man's his friend for the rest of his life. Yes, suré he is, but his life will only last five minutes. I would say your three hundred Hongkong was mine, John Joseph."

John Joseph sat up, facing the east, and nudged Du Rande. Coming toward them, with the sun at his back, they made out the figure of a foreigner, an American, they thought, on foot with two coolies carrying his luggage. When he drew near they saw that he was a spare, emaciated man, with beard prematurely white.

"Would this be the medical missionary?" asked McGonigle. "He's some kind of one, I can tell by his build. On all the seven seas I've never seen one yet that had a double chin or a dimple. Bones are by way of being their badges of office. I suppose it's evolution that makes them so; the fat ones and the fathers of the future fat ones were eaten by cannibals."

Though he was still half a corpse himself and limp as a rope he could always jest, this McGonigle.

The medical missionary stopped before their chairs.

"Are you from Shaan Moon?" he asked. "I hear there's been fighting."

"Oh, a bit of a scrap," said McGonigle, and he described it.

"It was One Minute, all right, did that," said the Medical Missionary. "I know him well. The more fools the Cantonese, to trust him. Poor devils!" And he sighed as one who has looked on too many miseries and horrors for anything to shock him any more.

"What's the matter with your face," he asked McGonigle suddenly, looking at the five hollows, like tiny craters, on his chin.

"Chicken-pox," said McGonigle. "I got it from the kids at the river mission, I suppose. Chan Yat Chan tried some native doses on me that knocked me halfway to heaven."

"Chicken-pox, my foot," said the medical missionary. "The kids at the river mission were well and jumping around like fleas long ago, and they've no marks on them like that. It looks like smallpox, and yet it doesn't."

"But I've been vaccinated," said McGonigle.

"Say!" the medical missionary demanded suddenly. "You haven't come in contact with troops of Wu Pei Fu?"

"There was the river junk," said McGonigle. And he described the boarding of her, and how all the men were dead.

"Are you sure they were killed in battle? How did they look?"

"I don't remember many wounds, now I think of it," said John Joseph. "I didn't linger. They weren't very pretty. Black as buried duck eggs."

"Did you ever hear of black smallpox?"

"Why, yes. It's not common. You never get well from that."

"No," said the missionary. "You never get well, they say. That's the thing with which our doctors can do nothing. And no vaccination is proof against it. It begins with a raging headache, and the disease may last three days. Then the blood vessels all over your body burst, and you die. Nice little disease. It broke out in a battalion of northern troops some weeks ago and all died but two or three. These escaped and fled

to the rest of the army, carrying the infection, and now its everywhere."

"But that's not what I had," said McGonigle, "for it brings no pits. And if there's no cure, how could I be cured from it?"

"There are medical missionaries who have been here longer than I have," said the stranger. "Twenty to fifty years, a few have been in China. And these colleagues have said to me, 'Bob, if ever I get the black smallpox, send for a native physician, will you?' "

"A native physician? What would he know?"

The lean man looked across the hills as if an enigma lay curled on every one.

"The Chinese medico may not be an authority on bacteriology, my friend. And I would hesitate to have him cut out a brain tumor, for instance. But he was a doctor when our civilization was cradled in the island of Crete, and the pyramids were not yet risen.

"This is what I have heard of his treatment of the black smallpox; that while the European doctor gives drugs in an attempt to lessen the fever, the Chinese concocts a medicine that will increase it to the boiling point. In fact, many of the cases he handles die of prostration, due to this. But it is better, if one must die, to die unconscious of fever than of breaking blood vessels and in agony.

"And, they say, that if the fever rises enough, and the patient is not killed, the poison will be driven from his body into pustules of the skin, and so he will be cured."

"And maybe that is what he did for me," said McGonigle. "Do you think so? He left without a thought that I should thank him."

"If he treated and cured you," said the missionary, "remember him gratefully. For there was the greatest danger, during his treatment, that he would take the contagion himself, and die."

"Why in heaven should he do it?" said Du Rande. "By —— I'm not sure if I myself would have helped a friend with black smallpox. Why should he help a foreigner, especially, and a stranger? And at such a time, with an army at the gates? What was it of his concern?"

"There is only one answer I can think of," replied the doctor. "And it is absurd, but perhaps the truth. Your friend here, despite the marks of his illness, looks like a strong man. Robust as an ox ordinarily, I should say. And Chan is little. His bodyguards were picked for their size—did you notice? He has always loved a large man, and it is lucky to be fat in China. And besides, he is vain of his skill in medicine, vainer of that than all his military exploits. Well, I must be on my way. If the dead are not buried speedily in Shaan Moon there will be a pestilence there also."

McGonigle and Du Rande looked at one another, after he had left, and said nothing. The coolies were fidgeting and making signs that they wished to depart.

"We'll split the money," said Du Rande at last. "Take yours and I'll take mine. There's no answer to that wager. I'll be glad to get to civilization again. I don't understand this country; I don't understand the people. Now a white man, you can always tell what he's going to do. He's a safe bet."

"I guess that's right," said McGonigle. "Well, call Jaffrey and we'll be on our way."

But Jaffrey was not there. Though they combed the bamboo grove there was no sign of his coolies or him, except a discarded book, stolen from Du Rande's luggage, whose pages, once glued together at the edges, were ripped open with a pen-knife. He was gone, and with him six hundred Hongkong dollars in notes of large denomination.

Storm flight with the Border air patrol

Medium

THE BIG De Haviland bombing plane was a little more than eight thousand feet high, and "Shag" Moran, its pilot, had an excellent view of a considerable portion of south Texas. His big body was hunched deep into the front cockpit to avoid the terriffic airblast which swept back from the propeller, and his black eyes alternated the maze of unfamiliar instruments before him and the unending desert of mesquite below. In long, gray-green waves the chaparral billowed away to the horizon on every side, and there was not so much as a wisp of smoke to indicate that a living thing inhabitated that trackless waste, a mile and a half below.

It was a sight calculated to make any pilot concentrate on his motor, for there was no possible landing field below, in case that twelve-cylinder Liberty ahead should start to miss. To Shag Moran, however, the very ugliness and desolation of it was a pleasant thrill—a constant reminder of where he was going, and why. Even the thought of himself, alone in a world of his own, was delightful, for the time being. It was the visible evidence of the fact that he had attained combined objectives for which he had dared not hope, three months before.

"First Lieutenant John Moran, of the McMullen flight of the Border patrol—" He mouthed the words with leaping heart as his eyes swept the wastes below him, which seemed to epitomize all the romance and danger of the job he was on his way to do. He was bound for the border. More than that, he was to be a member of the blue ribbon outfit of the Army Air Service, the Border patrol. And as the last ingredient of what he conceived to be a flyer's paradise, he was to be one of the McMullen flight of that patrol—the flight with the finest record along the Rio Grande.

The miracle—for miracle it was—was still unreal to him. Of course, they were ordering extra men to the patrol. The underground gossip, which was running like wildfire through the Air Service, was that —— was due to pop along the Border. The smuggling in of aliens had reached tremendous proportions, and the guarded conversation of higher offices was to the effect that one of the largest, nerviest and wealthiest rings which had ever operated in Texas was due for a roundup.

But that Shag Moran had been picked to go to the patrol was purely a mistake. Moran admitted that. Some slip-up in Washington. Why, he'd only got his wings a few short weeks before, and had scarcely two hundred hours in the air. Not enough experience for border service, he reflected. But he'd bluff it through, and cut out his tongue before he let anyone know what an amateur he was. And he'd fly with any of them.

He grinned to himself as he thought:

"Boy, what they'd say if they knew

By THOMSON BURTIS

Boiled

that I never flew a De Haviland in my life before today! But I got this baby off the ground at Donovan and nobody'll ever dream I never flew one!"

No more than they'd dream how much his wings and flying meant to him. The dogged, heart-breaking fight he had waged to drag himself from the poverty-stricken slime of his boyood, through school, and then to an officer's commission. The ambition of terrible years was fulfilled for Shag Moran. And nobody suspected that there had been tears in his eyes when he got his commission. Big, hulking, shambling Shag Moran was supposed to be hard-boiled. That's what the carelessly competent young fliers thought about him, and he was glad of it. He would have cut off his hand rather than let them know his real love for the air, and of his perfect contentment, now that he was a flyer. Why, if the border men knew how he felt about being one of them, they'd laugh themselves sick. Think he was crazy. They took the job as a matter of course. They hadn't worked a lifetime for it.

THERE was McMullen, and he was going to hit it right on the nose. It must be, according to his map. There was a dun pocket-handkerchief of a field, surrounded by buildings, a few miles west of a sizable town. Surely those big, black blotches against the ground were the two iron hangars flanking the field to east and west. And that town was McMullen, all right—it was too big to be an unnoted settlement. Southward a few miles the Rio Grande was a twisting, silver ribbon, glinting in the flooding sunlight.

He'd start down, now. Had he been more familiar with De Havilands, he might have essayed spiraling down closer to the field. He would take no chances now, though.

He eased back on the throttle, until the tachometer was down to nine hundred revolutions a minute, and nosed down slowly. He watched his airspeed meter like a hawk. He kept the speed of his ship at a hundred miles an hour. The wind was making the wires sing, and there was considerable vibration.

In a perfectly straight, conservative dive he flashed earthward, his body tense with the strain. Now he could see tiny figures lounging on the steps of one of the buildings which formed the southern boundary of the sandy airdrome. He was going to have an audience for his landing, which made it worse. With every moment, it seemed, that field was shrinking in size. The northern boundary of it was a fence. He prayed that the wind would be from the south, so that he could land in from the north. It would be impossible for him to bring that big plane down over the obstacles on the other three sides.

The altimeter read a thousand feet when he pulled the ship up and shoved

the gun all the way on. He was a half mile back of the field as he flew level toward it. He circled it once, and saw that the wind-sausage on top of one of the corrugated iron hangars indicated a southeast wind. Some one had said that the wind was usually southeast—the Gulf breeze. Yes, there were at least a half dozen men lounging in the shade of a porch. There were several buildings along that southern rim, and two long lines of tents.

He drove northward a half mile, circled warily, and cut the gun to seven hundred revolutions. He fairly felt his way toward the ground, trying to watch the ground, his airspeed and the tachometer all at once. He must barely ease over that fence, at the lowest speed possible.

He got too low. He was only fifty feet high, several hundred yards back of the fence, and the motor barked into sudden life as his hand thrust the throttle forward. He seemed to be going terribly fast, for being so close to the fence, and he cut the motor to idling. Downward, bit by bit, the fence had flashed beneath him. He was going like lightning.

From a height of six feet it seemed that the D.H. dropped out from underneath him. The wheels hit the ground hard, and the big ship bounced high in the air. His hand automatically found the throttle as the plane hung, nose in the air, and jammed it all the way forward.

He'd have to go around again. Cursing himself for a clumsy fool, he raved—

"I thought I was flying a Jenny, —— it! I ought to be pushing baby carriages."

Those veterans down there were laughing at him, doubtlessly. Having to go around twice to make a field—an airdrome—with a perfectly good motor. He had looked like a cadet, on his first solo.

Again he shot for the field and this time, with his heart in his mouth, he got to a foot above the ground with the fence only twenty-five feet behind him, and he held the ship there. Again it seemed that he was going at express-train speed, but he caught the drop in time. He jerked the stick back, and although he was a bit late, the ship only bounced once, and scarcely more than a foot. The buildings seemed a safe distance ahead, too.

They were, for a Jenny, but not for a heavy D.H., rolling fast on a hard, sand field as smooth as a floor. Desperately he cut the switches, and finally, panic-stricken, threw his stick to one side and jammed on full rudder. The D.H. ground-looped, one wing-skid dragging the ground. Not enough to cause any damage, though, and as he snapped on the switches again he told himself:

"I got down—but how? This time I was going too —— fast, after coming in too slow the first time."

Mechanics were waving him toward the line in front of the eastern hangars, and he taxied toward them, gingerly. He felt that he was handling the D.H. awkwardly. It was infinitely more responsive, even on the ground, than a Jenny. Somehow or other he felt uncertain, now, about his ability to control these bigger ships as he had learned to master the training planes.

He was grateful for the fact that the mechanics came out to meet him, and by pulling on the wingtips helped him, into the line straight. At the same time his quick sensitiveness made him wonder whether they were doing it because they had noticed his uncertainy in handling his ship.

A short, stocky officer was coming toward him, and on the collar of his O.D. shirt were the bars of a captain. That was the famous Captain Kennard—two planes to his credit in France, D.S.C. and Croix De Guerre, recognized as the best squadron commander on the border.

Moran came to attention, and the square-faced captain returned his salute nonchalantly.

"You're Moran, eh?" he said in a raucous voice, and his face, scarred by innumerable wrecks, split into a genial grin. "Glad to see you. The boys'll unwire your suitcase. Come on over and meet the gang."

Moran relaxed a bit. So the C.O.

wasn't going to hop on him about that landing right away, he reflected gratefully. He removed his helmet in the withering heat, baring the coarse, unruly black hair which had given him his nickname. Perhaps his beard had had something to do with it, too. Sometimes he shaved twice a day in an endeavor to control it, but his heavy jaw always looked dark and bristly, nevertheless.

"Sure glad to see you," repeated Kennard, his bowed legs moving faster than Moran's unusually long ones. "They're flying us ragged, and a new man's welcome."

"I heard something was up, but no one seemed to know much about it," ventured Moran.

"We don't know a —— of a lot, ourselves," Kennard told him. "But it's pretty plain that they're watching a gang in Mexico who've been running chinks and other immigrants over. The runners get around a thousand per man, delivered in San Antone. Army of 'em. Anyway, it's patrol all day, and be on the alert all night, with a dozen false alarms every hour. Must be good and big and tough, this gang, or Washington wouldn't be acting as though there was a war on.

"Attention, boys and girls. Here's the latest victim. Moran, shake hands with Tex MacDowell, Slim Evans, Pop Cravath, George Hickman, and last, but not least, Dumpy Scarth."

Moran recognized all but the last man from things he'd heard about them. Lean, lounging "Tex" MacDowell; "Slim" Evans, who was nearly six feet six inches tall and as thin as a rail; big, blond Hickman and "Pop" Cravath, who were observers.

"Dumpy" Scarth was a new name to him, and he had thought he knew every member of the flight by name and description. Scarth was a short, fat, little fellow, with a pug nose, a full moon-face, and boyish eyes, which looked the big, new man over with a critical air.

"I know of all of you," Moran told them slowly. "That is, except Scarth here. I—er—never heard—"

"He just joined the outfit," Kennard informed him.

"Then you're new to the border too?" Moran said awkwardly. He was in an agony of self-consciousness, because of the figure he'd cut on that landing.

"What?" squawked Scarth. "New to the border! Why, I've been with the Laredo flight for years! Didn't you ever hear of that Caloras case?"

"No, probably he didn't," Slim Evans cut in casually. "There really are a few birds in the world who've never heard of you, Dumpy."

Scarth bridled like a bantam rooster. Now he looked Moran over scornfully, and Shag was suddenly aware that his shoes were wrinkled and unpolished and clumsy looking. Kate, his sister and only surviving relative, cost him a good deal in college. Too much for him to afford forty dollar boots and hundred and fifty dollar uniforms.

"You sure came in in a burst of glory," Scarth informed him with relish. "Two bounces—I thought sure you were a major."

"I—er—hit an airpocket the first time," Moran told him.

He was standing at the foot of the steps, shifting from one foot to another, always conscious of the speculative scrutiny to which he was being subjected by the men who would have to live on intimate terms with him for months.

"Air pocket ——!" yapped Dumpy. "You were coming in too slow! The second time you looked as though you were trying to break speed records. I suppose the wind shifted on your tail that time."

It had come. Suddenly Shag was conscious of an overweening desire to close Scarth's mouth for him. The others had said nothing.

"Not exactly," he said with difficulty, moistening his lips. He felt as if he was on trial. "The throttle stuck a minute, and the motor was turning up pretty fast—"

"Listen to Alibi Ike!" jeered Dumpy. "Had much time on D.H.'s?"

Moran's eyes were stormy, his heavy

face set. —— this cocky, nasty little runt—

"Why," he began, moistening his lips, "I—"

"Dry up, Dumpy," drawled Tex MacDowell easily. "Likewise, lay off. What the —— are you catechizing about?"

"Hello, here comes Jimmy Jennings, and my ship's coming out. Come on, Pop!" Dumpy exclaimed, forgetting everything else.

He ran for his helmet and goggles as Moran watched the incoming patrolship enter the field. He knew who Jimmy Jennings was. A border veteran, and an ace.

The big D.H. roared across the airdrome, from the east, circled a hundred feet north of the field, and suddenly tilted on one wing. Down it came in a terriffic sideslip, its nose parallel to the fence. Thirty feet above the ground it dived out of the slip, nose coming around toward the field, and as it came across the fence the pilot skidded it sidewise to kill speed.

Starting two hundred feet high, only a few yards back of the fence, the pilot had brought the ship to the ground as lightly as a feather, within twenty-five yards of the fence, and stopped rolling a little more than halfway across the field.

"That's flying," Shag thought humbly.

"Don't mind Dumpy," Slim Evans advised him spaciously. "Dumpy firmly believes he's the world's best flyer, frankly admits it on every provocation, and the —— of it is that he's —— near right!"

"What are you going to do with a man that brags all night, and then goes out and proves the next day that he can live up to his bragging?" grinned Kennard.

"Every new man is a prospective rival to him," Slim went on, "and he tries to put said rookie in his place. But he's a great little cuss when you get to know him—"

"Watch him prove something now."

Moran watched, and held his breath. Dumpy took off from the northern end of the field, cleared the buildings, and then turned back. He swooped low across the ground on his return trip, and then, for a full minute, he showed what could be done with a big bomber in the hands of a master. He chased his own tail like a gargantuan dragon fly, tipping the D.H. up into vertical banks in which the lower wingtip was only inches off the ground. One final rush across the field, another zoom in which the ship stood on its tail and appeared to climb up the side of the recreation building, and he was off.

"That's him, himself," grinned Hickman, who was almost as big as Moran. "You gave him an opening by springing those alibies."

"They weren't alibies—"

"The —— they weren't," Kennard advised him. "We listen to too many of 'em down here. This field's tough the first few times, and good flyers've —— near starved to death, they had to go around so many times. And every —— one with an alibi, instead of admitting it. Like you."

Hurt, Moran stiffened.

"Well, alibi or no alibi, that little squirt, Scarth, better not buzz around too much, kidding people he don't know," he said gruffly. "Captain, can I be shown to my tent to clean up?"

Kennard looked at him curiously for a moment before replying. The others, it seemed, had been taken aback by his rasping ultimatum. Then:

"You may. Orderly! Show Lieutenant Moran to Tent Six."

VAGUELY miserable, Moran followed the orderly to the small, floored tent which was to be his border domicile. By the time he had set his things in order his trunk was brought from the afternoon train, and he was busy until six, straightening his meager effects and washing up in the bathhouse, down at the end of the boardwalk which ran between the two rows of tents. He was tying his tie when Slim Evans poked his long, thin nose into the tent.

"About chow time," he said cheerily. "Come on over."

Moran, though grateful for Slim's interest, merely nodded, and in a moment joined him.

"By the way," Slim said casually, "if

you like I'll go up with you tomorrow. There are some tricks about this field in this light air, and—"

"——, does one punk landing put me under instruction again? I've landed in worse fields than this one."

Slim looked at him, and Moran averted his face to hide what he felt was a telltale flush. He had been betrayed by his anxiety to hide the fact that he was a raw amateur who had no business on the border.

"As you please," the lanky airman said laconically, nor did he speak again until they entered the dining hall.

The others were already at the table, and a Chinaman was removing the soup plates.

"Jerry Sims and Tom Daly got it today— Just got a radiogram," barked Kennard from the head of the table.

"What?" yelped Slim. "How?"

"Must have been a forced landing in the mountains within a few miles of El Paso. In a cañon, crashed, burned."

"God Almighty."

The table had been quiet, Moran noticed, when they entered. Those tanned faces were set, and the eyes somehow old. Kennard directed his gaze to Moran.

"Know either one of 'em?" he inquired. "Marfa flight. They were great eggs."

Moran shook his head. The death toll of the border flyers totaled one out of eight, every year, he knew, and that very afternoon two of them had gone. In the mountains of the Big Bend.

He cleared his throat as he helped himself to bread. Because the simply told news affected him, he said bruskly—

"Well, that's what any man in this business has got to expect, and he can't kick when he kicks off."

"The —— he can't!"

It was stout, fiery Pop Cravath, his eyes snapping. Daly had been his friend.

"I suppose you look forward to burning to death, eh? Hard-boiled egg we have with us!" he stormed on.

Moran was in his shell, like a turtle. His eyes met Cravath's squarely as he stumbled on.

"Every man knows what to expect— it's just an incident—"

"You don't say! We'll give a dance in honor of it, I suppose, to let the world know that a few deaths here and there don't faze our nervy pilots!" Cravath spat bitterly. "I'm —— if I'm not sick of these guys that shoot off their mouths about how little danger means to them— when hard luck hits somebody else! And how loud they yelp when it hits them—"

"The worst of it is," Kennard slid in, "that we can't even go over into Mexico tonight, —— it!"

The object of his words had been to cut off the hot-tempered Cravath, Moran knew, and to ease the tension which had fallen over the depressed table.

The C.O.'s eyes were very keen and very cold as they rested on his newest flyer. He went on gruffly:

"It's the custom to go on a howling drunk every time a man gets knocked off and sort of forget it. Now we've got to stay on duty."

"They might have picked a better time to get killed, at that," Dumpy Scarth remarked.

Moran's eyes were on his plate. What had he said that they should disapprove of? Maybe he'd been a little rough for a newcomer. He'd just wanted to show them that he belonged. Why should they pick on him? Every move he made was a mistake, as far as they were concerned. Slowly, as he mulled it over in his mind, his misery congealed into resentment.

Always taciturn, he did not say a word during the remainder of the meal. Instinctively he felt that he wanted to be by himself, and he went directly to his tent. He lay there, thinking. Sensitive to the point of mania, he felt that he was off on the wrong foot with such speed that he could never start over again. His own fault, too. Trying to show off.

No, it wasn't. Why had that fat-headed runt, Scarth, started picking on him right away?

Toward midnight the flyers, who had been playing cards in the recreation room, came to their tents, and devil-may-care

laughter died away into quiet. Shag lumbered to his feet, and went out into the starlit night. The mesquite was murmuring, crackling softly, in the Gulf breeze, and the sky was like a purple roof over him. Over at headquarters, guards were at the telephone, and lights gleamed in the radio shack. East and west stretched the border—hundreds of miles. Southward, Mexico was like a brooding desert. Somehow all the romance, all the tradition, all the pregnant possibilities of the Border country seemed to be whispering to him from the velvet darkness, and his big body thrilled to it and his eyes glowed.

His imagination leaped from station to station—Laredo, Del Rio, Sanderson, Marfa—and he could see the ships on the line, looming like crouching monsters in the darkness, ready to spring into the air after their prey. Life could hold nothing to compare with this, and he was a part of it.

No, he wasn't, he thought as he went to bed with a thousand thoughts rioting in his brain. But he would be.

TWO SHIPS were off on the dawn patrol when he ate breakfast next morning—Dumpy Scarth and Tex MacDowell, with their observers. The others greeted him more or less naturally, but he could see that he was already pegged in their minds as a queer egg. He tried to force himself out of his customary taciturnity but it was hard.

At the end of the meal he said to the captain—

"If it's all right, sir, I'd like to practise a few landings."

"Sure. Your ship'll be No. 8."

Moran dreaded the prospect of learning to land a D.H. on that field, but it had to be done. Why hadn't he been man enough to admit his ignorance of big ships, and practise landings up at Donovan?

He knew that the bombers were considered too frail to stunt, so he went on with assumed carelessness—

"Do you people down here live up to that 'no stunt stuff' on those babies?"

"Of course!" snapped Kennard. "We don't make a habit of slapping God in the face."

The others grinned, their eyes on Moran.

"Perhaps you twist 'em around regularly?" inquired Slim Evans, and Moran flushed.

"Just wanted to know," he said awkwardly, and went out.

Ten minutes later he was in the front cockpit of No. 8, trying out the already warm motor. A mechanic held each wingtip, another sat on the tail and leaned against the airblast as he covered his eyes from the dust which swirled upward in a dense, cone-shaped cloud. The tires strained against the wheelblocks as Moran held the throttle wide open, his eyes sweeping his instruments. Air pressure, three; battery charging rate, two; temperature, eight degrees Centigrade; tachometer showing, 1750; oil pressure, twenty-five—all was as it should be, as far as he knew. He turned off one switch of the double ignition system, and listened. Not a miss. Then a brief tryout of the other switch, and he eased the gun back to idling. He adjusted his goggles and nodded to the crew, with a lump in his throat.

They pulled the wheelblocks, and he taxied to the northern end of the field. He turned safely, and gave it the gun. He knew he could take off all right. Pressing forward on the stick, feet braced against the rudder, he sent his ship roaring across the field, nose low to the ground. It took the air by itself, almost, and he swept across the buildings with twenty-five feet to spare.

In the cool, smooth morning air he felt some of his confidence return, and when he felt his way down across the fence at a mere seventy-five miles an hour he was sure he was going to make the field. He dared a skid to kill more speed, after he had leveled off and, although he bounced, the ship came to earth safely and stopped rolling with a bare twenty-five feet to spare.

Five times he landed, and three times he made it on the first try. He still felt

strange in it, and there was uncertainty in each landing. But he had self-confidence in the air, and there was no doubt now that eventually he'd be a capable De Haviland man even on that tiny field.

He decided to go high, and bank and sideslip and stall around a bit to get more accustomed to his ship. It was a thrill to feel the excess power in that motor. The air was pleasant to his perspiring face as it swept by him. He took in the view, avidly. McMullen, a small splotch on the ground, its paved streets white ribbons with bugs crawling on them. Fields dotted with patches of mesquite, the airdrome a tiny square seeming to be within a stone's throw of the town, really four miles away.

At four thousand feet he was directly over the field, and started banking more and more steeply to get the feel of the ship. He did figure eights, stalled it, wingturned. And with each moment his touch grew more sure, his heart lighter. That gnawing doubt about his ability vanished slowly but surely.

SUDDENLY he looked north, and it was a shock to see another D.H. curving toward him. It was Dumpy Scarth and Jack Lee, he thought. The ship came around, diving slightly for his tail. In a moment it had taken position, fifty feet behind and slightly above him.

"He wants a dogfight!" Moran thought. Well, he wouldn't get it. He, Moran, didn't know enough about D.H.s yet—

"—— if I'll funk it!" he told himself savagely. "Even if he does show me up."

Mock combat was a favorite diversion —good practise. The point was to get behind and above one's opponent, on his tail, and stay there.

Moran threw his ship into a diving bank, whipping it around heavily. He twisted and turned in wild abandon. He was high enough to be safe. Diving, zooming, going into vertical banks, he tried everything he dared, but Dumpy rode his tail serenely.

It became almost a battle in Moran's mind. ——, how he'd like to show up that little ——, and he couldn't even shake Dumpy off, much less get position himself. Down below he caught a brief glimpse of mechanics and officers watching, and suddenly his heavy jaw set. He'd shake Dumpy off, anyhow, D.H. or no D.H.

And he went into a dive, motor full on. Let Dumpy follow him now, if he was so smart. Those fellows below would find out what kind of a nerve their new flyer had.

The struts were shaking in their sockets, and the wires were screaming with the speed as the motor's roar rose to a veritable bellow. The airspeed went up slowly—a hundred and seventy, a hundred and ninety, two hundred—

Every instant he was going to pull it out, but with a sort of ferocious joy he held his ship in the dive, second after second. He was hunched deeply into the cockpit, his eyes on his instruments. He'd come down fifteen hundred feet. Now, if Dumpy was on his tail, he'd give up.

He looked around as he started to pull out, using both hands. It was all he could do to move the stick backward. Slowly the ship started to level, vibrating in every spar and strut. Dumpy was nowhere to be seen. He hadn't dared to follow.

The ship was just leveling off, finishing its swoop out, when Moran stiffened. Suddenly the stick seemed to have gone limp in his hands. It came all the way back without resistance.

He had cut the motor to pull out of the dive, and in a panic he shoved the throttle all the way on again. For a moment the ship had wavered, but now it resumed it's gradual leveling process. As it came level the nose started to go up into a stall, and Moran, his heart feeling as if it were encased in ice, shoved the stick forward.

The ship did not answer.

He eased the throttle back, and the nose settled. Slowly the frantic pilot looked around. The cabane struts, on the elevators, to which the control wires from the stick were attached, were both leaning toward him. The terrific strain of

pulling out of that dive had pulled them loose, and his elevators were useless. He could neither dive nor climb his ship. If he flew until the gas gave out and the propeller stopped, the ship would go into a nose dive which would not end until it hit the ground.

Suddenly Moran's brain seemed preternaturally clear and cool. The fact that sure death apparently awaited him was in the background, merely, of his consciousness, as he methodically thought things out.

The motor was his only hope. The ship seemed perfectly rigged, meaning that at a certain motor-speed it would fly level without the use of stick or rudder. It was flying level now, at fifteen fifty r.p.m. If he cut down the speed of the propeller, it would start diving. The point was that if he sent it into a dive, could he pull it out by turning on full power? Or would the weight of that thousand-pound motor hold it in the dive?

There was but one way to find out. Funny, how little he really felt as his steady hand eased the throttle back to twelve hundred. He seemed to be experimenting for some one else, to be off in another ship, watching a man fight for life.

The nose dropped slowly below the horizon, and he shot the throttle all the way forward. For an agonized moment the D.H. remained in an ever-steepening dive. Then, ever so slowly, the nose came up, and he brought the throttle back slowly to fifteen-fifty.

A chance to wreck, now, in a way that might not kill him. His ailerons and rudders were all right. He sent the ship into a shallow bank, speeding up the motor a trifle to offset the loss of lifting surface, and then straightened it out and headed north. The field adjoining the airdrome north of the fence was rough, but unwooded, and at least three hundred yards long. Then another fence, and a cultivated field. North of this last clearing was mesquite.

Ten miles north of the field he turned again, and headed for the airdrome. He brought the throttle back to fourteen hundred. In a gradual dive the ship sped downward, the airspeed meter crawling up to a hundred and fifty miles an hour. At five hundred feet he was still four miles north of that first cultivated field. Now he brought the throttle back further, and the dive steepened. He let it go for a while—he was about three hundred feet high now—and then shoved it all the way on.

He waited like a statue. Would it level off in time? Two hundred feet, a hundred and fifty, and then the nose started up. The ship was level, a mile back of that first field, and a hundred feet high. Again the throttle crawled back to fourteen hundred. His face was covered with sweat, his feet jumping on the rudder bar. In a series of brief steps he brought it down, and when he leveled the last time his heart leaped as the undercarriage brushed the mesquite. The ship darted across it, and as it cleared it he again inched the gun backward. The dive was so gradual this time that leveling off was almost as easy as doing it with the elevators. The stabilizer was already back, the tail as heavy as it could be made. Three feet above the ground he was rushing along level.

He crashed through the first fence, and the airdrome was close ahead. A wild rush across the intervening field, and the D.H. went through the boundary fence like a cannon ball through paper. He snapped the switches off, and the roar of the motor gave way to the singing of the wires.

He had been going more than a hundred miles an hour. A second after the motor died, the nose dropped suddenly. The D.H. bounced twenty feet in the air. For a second it hovered, stalled, and then crashed as its nose fell.

Moran threw his hands in front of his head. A terriffic jar, the splintering of wood and rending of linen. For a second all was blank, and then he found himself tearing his way out of the debris as the odor of burning gasoline assailed his nostrils. Bloody, dazed, only half conscious,

he was running, thirty feet from the crack-up, as a mass of flame burst from the wreckage, and died into a huge bonfire.

He slowed to a walk, and reason returned to him. Men were rushing from everywhere. Captain Kennard was in the lead, two other flyers behind him.

Moran stopped, his knees wobbly in the reaction. There was but one thought in his mind. He had proved himself a flyer worthy of his trust.

"What happened?"

His eyes met the captain's. The men were fighting the fire, but the officers were gathered about him, Dumpy Scarth in the front.

Moran gathered himself together, and essayed a grin.

"Elevators went wrong on me, that's all," he said with elaborate carelessness. "Brought her down with the motor. Wasn't that a —— of a note?"

The overwrought C.O. went into eruption—

"You're —— right it was a —— of a note! Think you're smart because you got out by a miracle, do you? You're a De Haviland stunt man, are you? What the —— do you mean, diving a D.H. like you did up there, against my orders and against good sense? By —— I don't care whether you kill yourself or not, but ships are —— valuable down here!

"Wipe that sickly grin off your face, —— you! You're entirely too smart for the border, and I don't give a hoot how good a flyer you are. Get that? You're confined to the post for a month, and if the boys weren't flying themselves to death I'd ground you besides. Just as quick as the ——'ll let me I'm going to get you transferred and swap you for somebody I can use."

The doughty captain whirled on Scarth. As if in a dream Moran heard him say savagely:

"As for you, Dumpy, the same thing goes. This is no time for your —— grandstanding, either. Couldn't resist raising —— with a new man, eh? What do you know about his flying, or what might have happened up there? You save your flying for patrol, understand, and mind your own business in the air and on the ground!"

Scarth flushed, and his mouth opened, but one look into the C.O.'s steely eyes was enough. Kennard took a last shot at Moran.

"A few crashes mean nothing to you, eh? Well, they mean something to me, right now. Hard-boiled egg, are you? Well, I've got no time to take that out of you down here. You'll have a chance to alibi your transfer in just about a week!"

Moran stood there, for a moment, like a dumbly suffering dog. Then, abruptly, curtains seemed to close over his eyes. They were muddy and opaque as he saluted stiffly, and stumbled blindly toward his tent.

He was to be transferred. The subconscious admission that his arraignment had been justified made matters no better. Dumpy Scarth again—

HE LAY on his cot, forgetting to go to lunch, and gradually his aching misery gave rise to unreasoning hatred for the cocky little flyer who had been his Nemesis.

As the taut days passed, the feeling grew in strength. He was utterly alone, brooding in his tent when he was not forced to appear in public. Dumpy, the irrepressible, had been hurt by his public tonguelashing, too, and he lost no opportunity to razz the black-browed Moran on his landings, which were still far from perfect. Moran rarely answered the taunts of the younger man, but often his eyes were not good to see.

He flew regular patrols, each one a nightmare. That they would soon cease, for him, was only part of the reason. Since that unforgettable landing he had lost all confidence in the De Havilands. A vibrating wire, or a momentary miss in the motor, caused by an air bump, made him tense and uncertain. He was afraid of those big ships which he could not control, as yet, and the memory of his escape from fire awakened him nights,

his body covered with sweat and his brain numb.

The occasional efforts of some of the flyers to be sociable, he met with brusk rebuffs, and they soon ceased. Every man of them was laboring under a strain. Five, sometimes six, hours of nerve-racking flying each day was their portion, and the waiting for something to break along the Border put the finishing touches on their overwrought condition. Moran, a veritable skeleton at the feast, was relegated to the rôle of "sorehead," and he knew it. He knew, also, that he was deliberately making his own lot harder, and perversely increasing his own unpopularity as he waited for the ax to fall.

It was not in him, however, to do anything but suffer by himself, and no torture could have dragged a word of admission from him. He lived through the days in dogged silence, masking his bruised spirit behind an impregnable armor of hard self-sufficiency.

IT WAS just before dawn of the fifth day following his wreck that he awakened to find the light on in his tent and Captain Kennard shaking him by the shoulder.

"Listen, Moran," Kennard barked rapidly. "We just got a call, and I'm taking five ships down toward Laralia. Big gang reported coming over the river an hour ago. I'm leaving you and Dumpy Scarth here and taking all the others. Patrol in turn, one of you at the phone all the time. Get up—we're taking off, *pronto!*"

Moran shivered as he dressed. A norther had been brewing for twenty-four hours, and now the wind was strong and chill. The Libertys were roaring on the line like gargantuan hounds on trail, and dark clouds were scudding across the graying sky. The helmeted flyers were like hooded demons of the night as they got into the cockpits and the ships left the ground in single file, gathering above the field at a thousand feet and hurtling eastward in V-formation like a flock of geese.

Naturally, they'd leave him behind, if anybody, Moran reflected bitterly. Dumpy Scarth had raved because he couldn't go. Moran tried to scotch the ugly knowledge which was in the back of his head. He was not glad that he hadn't been called on to take off in the dank darkness, and fly formation down the border. He was not afraid of De Havilands—

But he knew he was.

The dark, cold day dragged to a close. Three times he went out on patrol, alone, fighting the rising wind every mile of the way and returning to the field a nervous wreck. Some times the ship was thrown about like a leaf, and the tight-lipped, pale Moran lived eternities above the mesquite which seemed reaching upward to drag him down to destruction. The landings were nightmares, in that wind, but he got down safely each time.

He and Dumpy did not speak to each other. When one landed, the other took off. There was no word from the other ships until seven o'clock, as the quick darkness was falling. They had rounded up their prey, but reports of the ground men were that it probably had been a false alarm. A bunch of Mexican vaqueros, riding north after some cattle. The ships would stay at Brownsville rather than fight the gale and the darkness combined.

Dumpy returned from his last patrol as the call came in.

"Want the first watch tonight, or the last?" he inquired briefly.

"Either one," Moran told him sullenly.

He was ready to drop. The strain of the day had nearly broken him.

"Then I'll hit the hay. Wake me at twelve," Dumpy told him tersely. Then, characteristically, "Congratulations on the miracle."

Moran looked up quickly to meet the snapping eyes of the younger man.

"Just what do you mean?" he snapped. "What miracle?"

"——, you got down safe, didn't you?" inquired Scarth, with elaborate sarcasm.

Moran's eyes seemed to thicken, and there were red spots in them as he rose to his feet. He bent over, like some heavy-shouldered bear, resting his ham-like hands on the desk as he glared into Dumpy's face. He felt as if he was about to explode—every nerve was raw and jumping. His words were blurred, seeming to come from his lips with difficulty as he mumbled—

"Scarth, I swear that if you don't quit shooting off your mouth—"

"What?" Scarth shot back, perverse enmity in every line of his fat face.

Moran straightened, and his fingers were moving jerkily, his fists closed.

"That I'll ram your teeth down your throat, —— you. Now you get the —— out of here before I throw you out—and don't let me get started on you, do you hear? You've picked on me from the start, and I'll put you in a hospital if you say another —— word!"

Hate was in the air. The indomitable Scarth held his ground, for the moment, before the dark, grim giant whose face reflected black fury and tortured, helpless wrath.

For a long moment their eyes cocked. Suddenly it seemed that Dumpy realized that Moran could have picked him up and broken him in two, and was about to do it. There was a semi-madness in the bigger man's gaze, the fruit of strained days and sleepless nights.

Dumpy's eyes dropped, and he turned toward the door.

"—— foolishness to stay at the phone at that," he mumbled uncertainly. "Wind's getting worse every minute. Nobody could go anywhere if they had to."

He went out, and Shag settled down into the chair in front of the desk. The tiny office seemed hardly large enough to contain his huge body. His dull eyes looked into space, and time was non-existent. He had reached the point of physical and mental exhaustion where life itself was merely a bad dream.

He hardly realized that three hours had passed when the shrill of the telephone cut through the howl of the wind. He was a bundle of nerves as he answered its summons.

"Yeah, McMullen flight. Moran. Lieutenant Moran! What the —— does that matter? Kennard's not here. Who? Crosby? Yeah, go ahead."

For a moment he listened to the barked sentences coming out of the night. Automatically his mind registered the facts. Then:

"We'll see. Try to. 'By."

He rushed to the door, and out into the darkness. The clouds had broken, but fleets of them hurried across the sky, periodically blotting out the moon. The wind came in great gusts, alternating between comparative quiet and the proportions of a gale. As stark fear gripped him he fought it down, cursing himself for a yellow dog as he ran for Dumpy's tent.

The fat little flyer was writing a letter. He looked up in startled surprize as Moran burst into the tent.

"Ever hear of a customs man named Crosby?" Moran rasped.

"Sure. I know him."

"Is there a stool pigeon named José down at Carana—"

"Yes. Keeps the store. We've had trouble before, there. Little Mexican settlement—"

"Crosby just called up and said he landed in Carana and that there's a big bunch of aliens due over within an hour. It'll take a couple of hours before he can get help. Wants us—"

"To fly down!" shouted Scarth, leaping to his feet. "It can't be done! Listen to that wind."

Moran's eyes glittered suddenly.

"He says there's a field down there we've landed in before—"

"Sure there is. But we can't go. Are you crazy? I—"

Moran's contempt for Scarth, his utter contempt for his own yellowness, the fact that life was a hateful thing, all combined to force the words from his lips:

"We could make it. It's our business to. Scared, are you? The famous Dumpy Scarth, who can do so much

showing off when there's somebody watching, is scared to death when the real pinch comes, huh? A —— good fair-weather pilot, eh?"

Scarth's curiously boyish eyes gleamed, and his face was white.

"It's—it's suicide, I tell you! At night, this wind—"

"All right, stay here and write your letters!"

Moran stopped at the door, his smouldering eyes playing over the tense, uncertain Scarth. And his tongue flayed the youngster mercilessly as he dared him to come on, until the beleaguered Scarth, his own eyes ablaze, shouted:

"All right, —— you! I can go anywhere you can!"

A moment later stunned mechanics were warming up the ships in the flooding illumination of the huge landing lights, set on top of the hangars. Moran got into his cockpit in a daze, and was the first to taxi out. Mechanics stayed at each wingtip to help him in the wind. Certain that he was going to his death, and scarcely caring, he gave the motor the gun, and fought his ship into the air.

It seemed barely moving against the wind as he cleared the buildings. When be banked to make his turn, the wind almost turned him over, and the D.H. was blown a hundred yards, tipped up steeply, before he could force it level again. Crabbing into the wind, the ship pointed southwest as it flew due west, he looked around for Dumpy.

The other flyer was two hundred yards back of him. Shag, tight-lipped and tense, turned his eyes ahead. The earth was like a shadowed sea, turning from silver-green to black as the clouds continuously blotted out the moon.

The wind caught the ton-and-a-half bomber and played with it exultantly. Often it took all his strength on the stick to hold it level. It shot up and down in the scrambled air currents like a dried leaf in an autumn gale. Should the motor cut out, there was nothing but maiming or death in store for him below. He was breathless and physically sick under the strain. He really expected the ship to go to pieces at any moment, but he fought his way westward doggedly.

It was only a thirty minute flight to Carana, but it took an eternity of time. Twenty miles out the wind seemed to rise, shrieking its resentment at the puny mortals who were defying it. The D.H. was like an outlaw bronco, bucking and pitching in a mad effort to throw its rider. Moran, heavy jaw out-thrust, was suddenly aware of a sort of ferocious joy in fighting it. A lone rider of the storm, he yelled a blasphemous challenge which he could not hear himself, above the devil's song of motor and wind and screaming wires.

CARANA, a small collection of lights on the bank of the river, lay ahead only two miles. Dumpy was a mile south, the flames from his motor's exhaust pipes like two fiery red tongues. Moran was looking for Crosby's flashlight signal. Three flashes, and the alien runners were over; four, they were on their way; five, no action as yet and to land on the field, which Dumpy knew, but which Moran did not.

Dumpy was diving for the river now, and Moran, flying in a dream, turned south into the teeth of the storm and labored toward the Rio Grande. Had Scarth seen something below? If he had, it was the job of one ship, at least, to hold the smugglers with its machine guns.

The other one would land, conserving its gasoline supply for the time when the first ship ran low on fuel.

Dumpy was low over the river, a mile west of the settlement. Lights were winking on as Moran, five hundred feet high, looked down at Scarth's ship. The full moon had emerged temporarily from the clouds, and Moran saw what was happening as clearly as if it had been noonday.

Dumpy's ship seemed to stand still in the air, for a moment, as a tremendous gust of wind threw Moran's own plane on its side. As if slapped by the hand of some invisible giant, the left wing of Scarth's D.H. flipped high in the air.

Half on its back, the lower ship plunged into the river in a short upside down dive, and a shower of spray hid it momentarily from the stunned Moran's straining eyes.

It came into view as the water fell. It floated, apparently, in tragic quiet, the motor submerged and the tail high in the air.

Automatically Moran shoved the stick forward. There was no movement below —not an extra ripple on the smooth, turgid water of the river. Dumpy had been knocked out and was helpless beneath the water.

At that second, something within Moran seemed to break. Each taut nerve snapped, and the reaction left him quiet, almost weak, but with his mind clear. He was like a man who has just awakened from a nightmare into reality still more horrible. So much so that the climax of terror left him calm, fatalistic, hopeless.

Motor full on, he sent the frail D.H. hurtling downward in a power dive which made the wires shrill madly and the ship tremble from nose to tail. He was without fear, and his hand was steady as a rock on the stick.

In that brief moment, with the roar of the overspeeding motor dinning in his ears and the peril of the storm surrounding him, he kept his eyes on that wreck below, and saw himself for what he was. He realized what he had done when he had forced Dumpy into this mad trip.

He was calling himself a murderer as he leveled his ship above the water. He was a hundred feet back of that sinister mass, floating so peacefully. He was possessed of a great calm, and he handled his great ship with a sureness he had never known before.

He cut the throttle, and nosed the D.H. upward. It lost speed, and as the stalling point came he threw it into a steep bank, left wing down. He jammed on right rudder at the instant when flying speed was about to disappear, and the De Haviland shot downward on one wing, with scarcely a mile of forward speed.

He gathered himself as the water rushed up to meet him and the airblast flayed his left cheek. The left wing cut the water five feet from Scarth's wreck. The motor plowed into the river, and the ship flipped over, half on its back, as the left wingtip smashed into the bottom of the shallow stream and the entire structure of linen and wood crumpled in a series of ripping, tearing reports.

He was unhurt, and he had unsnapped his belt buckle at the instant of crashing. He was out, wading through the water, which was to his armpits. He took a long breath, and plunged under the other ship.

His groping hands found the body, hanging limply, head downward. His lungs bursting, he heaved upward on the unconscious Scarth, to keep the weight from the belt, and tore at the buckle. It was an eternity before it unfastened, and as he got Scarth above the water he fell limply against the soaked fuselage.

For a moment he had to stay there until his laboring lungs and bursting head grew more normal. Then he stumbled through the water toward the shore. He had scarcely laid Dumpy down when three riders came galloping madly through the mesquite along the river bank.

It was Crosby, with two Mexicans. The customs man took in the situation at a glance, and went to work on the unconscious Scarth with no comment other than a curt:

"If anybody was comin' across tonight they won't now. They'll have heard the ships."

The crude first-aid methods did their work, and Dumpy revived. When his nausea was over Crosby put him on his horse.

"José here can give you a bed to dry out in," the customs man told him cheerily. "Here, Moran, get on José's pony. We'll walk alongside."

As they started slowly up the trail alongside the river Moran ranged his pony alongside Scarth's. There was a great peace within him.

"Scarth," he said slowly, "I was a —— fool tonight. We had no business trying to fly and I—just horsed you into it because we hated each other, I guess. I—"

" 'T'sall right," Dumpy mumbled awkwardly. "I was a bigger fool than you. I didn't have to come. And—thanks for pulling me out."

But Moran would not be headed off. He felt that he had to talk, to explain himself to some one.

"I wasn't myself," he went on doggedly. "I got kind of scared of these D.H.s in that wreck, and I was so yellow I just had to fly. I was so scared I wasn't scared, if you get me. I never flew D.H.s before, but razzing you into pretty near a sure accident was—"

"Huh?" grunted Dumpy, his eyes probing Moran's with a curious glitter in them. "You never flew D.H.s before you came down here, you mean?"

Moran nodded.

"I hated to admit it—I wanted to stay, and so I lied and bluffed. I'm just telling you this so that you'll know I wasn't—I didn't mean all that stuff. I was just cuckoo, between one thing and another."

"Well I'll be ——," Dumpy repeated softly, as if musing to himself. He shivered, and seemed to rouse himself from reveries.

"It's all right. Couple o' things got under my hide too, I guess."

"Thanks. Just wanted to—sort of let bygones be bygones before I leave. That'll be in a day or two, I guess."

They relapsed into silence. Moran's face was serious and composed. He did not notice the continuous looks which the impulsive younger man threw at him. He was wrapped in his thoughts. He had burned his bridges behind him in admitting his amateurishness as a flyer, he knew, and any lingering hope that he might stay on the Border was gone. Nevertheless, the bitterness had been purged from him, and he was glad.

AT McMULLEN the next afternoon Dumpy, who had been very thoughtful all day, was first to report to Kennard. Moran changed his clothes, and went to headquarters later. The little captain had one dusty boot on the desk, and he cocked a keen, gray eye at Moran, while he dragged on a cigaret.

"I learned all I had to know from Dumpy," he stated in his husky voice. "Still breaking up my ships, huh?"

Moran's lips widened a trifle in response to the twinkle in the C.O.'s eyes.

"So you tried to put across a bluff down here, eh? What a —— fool you are! Well, I'll tell you, Moran. I sometimes like guts more than experience, and I guess if you want to stick around the Border that much, we can stand it. You can get experience here."

Moran's dry mouth opened, but no words came as he saluted and walked out into the flooding sunshine which had followed the storm.

An Egyptian Lodging

BY

HARRY A. FRANCK

AS NIGHT came on I sought out a native lodging-house, of which there are scores scattered through the entire city of Alexandria. It was a single, unpartitioned room, as large as a warehouse and not far different in appearance. At the door, dreaming over his narghileh, squatted the proprietor. Duty had he none other than to stretch forth his hand to each arriving guest for his two-piastre fee.

Exactly in the center of the building was a large fountain of clearest water; above it swung a massive brass lamp that lighted softly all but the far corners. On either side of the narrow alleyway, from door to rear wall, stretched a vast raised platform carpeted with grass mats. Beside the proprietor was a great pile of blankets. Other furnishings, large or small, were there none.

Newcomers paid their admission, growled out a greeting, caught up a blanket, and marched to the fountain. Having washed face, hands and feet therein, they dropped their slippers in the passageway, mounted one of the platforms, spread the blanket in the nearest unoccupied space and, assuming a grief-stricken countenance, went solemnly through their prayers.

A few squatted, to roll and smoke a final cigaret. The great majority, their devotions ended, wound themselves in the blankets and lay down to sleep.

Public as it was, the inn accommodated many women. The females conducted themselves exactly like the men, except that the ablutions and the prayers were omitted. Between the sexes neither a word nor a gesture passed.

Silence settled early over the scene, tempered by the almost melodious choral snoring, for the Arab snores gently, never in the rasping manner of the West. The proprietor closed the door, but kept his place, sucking dreamily at his glowing narghileh.

In the small hours I awoke for a moment. The smoker squatted motionless in the selfsame spot, the white vapor curling lazily upward. When next I opened my eyes he was pushing back the massive door. A streak of grayish light stole in upon us. A sleeper awoke, then another, and another. Each, as he rose, clapped on the fez that had fallen from its place, then picked his way to the fountain.

The faint splashing of water began. One by one, their washing over, the lodgers halted in the passageway for morning prayers. Then slowly, with dignified tread, dropping their folded blankets as they passed again with grumbled greeting, they wandered away into the city. The women made exit with the rest, and at sunrise the proprietor nodded drowsily beside his heap of blankets, behind him a vacant building.

Beginning ARTHUR O. FRIEL'S *Novel*

The Devil's Castle

FIVE hundred miles up the opaque Orinoco, a patch-sailed piragua nosed her slow but steady way against the sleepy current of the dry season. On her sun-blistered deck six men dozed and three watched.

Aft, a ragged mestizo sat wide-legged at the tiller. Forward, the master—bull-bodied, jaguar-faced, chocolate-skinned—squatted in the extreme bow, conning the rocks and shoals and varying depths. Behind him, lolling against the tiny box of a galley, a lean man of better clothing and different breed looked about with apparent boredom, yet with gaze all-seeing. For the most part his attention was directed toward the constantly unfolding view beyond, but from time to time he glanced aside and, at less frequent intervals, behind. Near him, in the shade of the lopsided squaresail, drowsed another man who, like himself, wore khaki clothing and solar helmet—the headgear now reposing on the back of head and neck, while the face was concealed between loosely folded arms. The other nappers, farther back, were tattered accidents of miscegenation, like the steersman.

The man against the galley yawned silently as he swung another look around. Afar on either side stood steep clay banks, littered with the pallid corpses of fallen trees and surmounted by the endless verdure of myriad growths still upstanding. Nearer stretched vast *playas* of heat-shimmering sand, rimmed along the water's edge by herds of squat turtles attended by watchful vultures; both awaiting the rush of eggs, now near at hand, which would relieve most of the reptiles of a heavy load but would leave some sick or dying.

Behind and ahead lay empty water, curving among the sand-banks, and beyond the eastern shore-trees rose brown burned hills, thin-grassed, studded with grotesque black stones. Nothing else, except the blue bowl of sky and lazy white cumuli, was to be seen.

"*Andal!*" droned the pilot.*

The dull-eyed helmsman, though unable to see the squatting prompter because of intervening sail and galley, altered the tiller-slant, without question. Evidently he knew the river as well as his master. The clumsy craft edged over toward the eastern bank, following a deep channel. Then, without orders, the rudder was shifted back to straight-ahead. The larger *playas* crept away behind, and wide waters opened before. Presently a sweeping curve approached. As the vessel began her crawl in the new direction the watching passenger sat straighter and peered with aroused interest.

*A Venezuelan boatman's command, usually meaning "shift the course".

Treasure-Hunting up the Orinoco

The flanking hills were rising to a rugged range of low mountains, terminated at the river by precipices. As the boat plowed onward and the obtruding western shore drew itself out of the line of vision, two huge black domes of stone came into view below the abrupt end of the ridge. Smoothly elliptical, they resembled the upper halves of colossal, inky eggs, partly buried in the alluvial sands, washed down by countless centuries of floods. Their uniformity and immensity made them by far the most striking of all the queer rock shapes bordering the weird midsection of the mysterious old river.

For several minutes the passenger contemplated them, narrow-eyed. Then his good-humored lips, lightly brown-bearded, quirked in a whimsical smile.

"Ramón, what sort of bird laid those eggs?" he drawled, in slow Spanish.

The dark-faced master turned his head and flashed a grin.

"Ho, señor, those are not eggs," he corrected. "They are Las Tetas."

"Oh, I see."

The señor eyed the bulging stones again, tardily recognizing their resemblance to gigantic breasts. His informant continued to grin, and seemed about to voice some jest, much more broad than long; but, after a few seconds of hesitation, left unspoken. One could not always be sure, he had learned, that this North American's sense of humor would chime with his own. He faced forward again.

The lounging observer's left hand reached to a shoulder of his recumbent companion, and squeezed. A grunt responded. Up from the concealing arms lifted a sallow, wide-featured face, puff-lidded, marked by lines of dissipation around the rather thick lips. Yellowish eyes of cold amber tint peered questioningly into the darker, warmer brown orbs of the watcher.

"Some thing to look at, Rafe," the latter casually enlightened, nodding toward the twin domes.

The amber gaze switched, the head rose higher, and a black-haired hand tipped the *topi* farther forward. After a brief interval of gazing, "Rafe" lifted his thick-set body to a curl-legged sit, leaning on one hand as he continued to survey the colossi. He yawned wide and loud, physically sluggish from his doze; but his intent scrutiny proved him mentally wide awake. Presently he spoke.

"At last," he said, "we seem to be approaching promising country."

His voice was thick and throaty, but his enunciation excellent, though tinged by an almost imperceptible accent, native or acquired, betokening long use of the Spanish tongue. Indeed, his precise articulation was in itself a betrayal, so markedly did it contrast with the easy slur of the words voiced by his unmistakably American mate.

"Just what I was thinking," agreed the latter. "Things are getting bigger and blacker and rather infernal."

"They were infernal enough at the Puerta del Infierno, many miles down the river, but they did not get us anything, Jule."

"True enough," nodded Jule. "But

we have a thousand miles of river still ahead of us, according to the maps, and the devil ought to show up somewhere along the line."

Rafe chuckled and changed position, folding his legs now in front of him. Jule drew up his knees and dovetailed his capable hands around them. Both sat for some time without further converse.

The titanic negro breasts came nearer, bulked larger, then, as the vessel forged on, crept one behind the other and were one. By the time the outer one was abeam the men had tired of scanning them, and were looking beyond. Along the left shore were other odd stones of the same funereal hue, but none so massive or eye-compelling as those just seen.

"Rafe, how big d'you suppose that castle of ours is, anyway?" idly queried Jule.

Rafe scratched the back of his neck, one loose shirtsleeve sliding elbow-ward and revealing a thick forearm, so heavily furred with black hair as to seem that of a gorilla.

"Never having seen it, I can't estimate," he returned. "But it must be very big and striking, or it wouldn't have earned its name."

"Well, now, partner, I'm not so sure of that. Striking, yes, it must be, if it's shaped like that funny old sketch of yours. But big—maybe so, maybe not. I've noticed, as we came along, that these Venezuelans seem to hitch names on a lot of insignificant stuff. For instance, remember that black, peaked stone on the crest of that hill away back at Curicim—the thing they called Negro Parado, or Motionless Black Man? 'Twas nothing remarkable; we had to look sharp to find it when they called our attention to it. Well, if they'd dignify a thing like that with a name, then the Devil's Castle may be a lot smaller than you'd imagine."

"Maybe," slowly conceded the yellow-eyed man. "If so, it will be easier to explore."

"True enough," repeated Jule. "Easier for us—and for others before us."

At that Rafe scowled. His lips set, and the lines of self-will around them deepened. When he spoke his tone was repressed, but his accent more noticeable.

"See here, Marden, you've been making cracks like that ever since we started," he accused. "Why keep dropping the wet blanket, I ask you?"

The other laughed lightly.

"Don't get sore, Mr. Dussault," he advised, with ironic formality. "I haven't yet denied the existence of the castle, have I? And I wasn't too pessimistic to start, or to keep going after starting. But I've learned that the fellow who doesn't expect too much doesn't get too much disappointed. So when I build castles in the air I don't make them too big."

"Ah! And so now you consider this to be only a castle of air?" Dussault's scowl deepened.

"Oh, call it whatever you like—castle of air, castle of the devil, castle of solid stone—what's the odds?" Marden's voice remained good-humored. "I'm still looking for it, old bean, while you, if I may remind you of the fact, snooze away the golden hours with your face to the deck. And so saying, let's both scan the scenery yonder and quit crabbing."

Dussault muttered something behind closed lips, but turned his gaze again shoreward. Domes and ridge now lay well behind, and inland showed a panorama of comparatively low, but exceedingly rough, country. Far in the blue distance soared mighty mountains, faintly outlined against the sky—the Titans of the wilderness of Guayana.

Nearer and plainer, reaching almost to the river's edge, a chaos of precipices shouldered one another in huddled, motionless mêlée, partly screened by rank tree-growth, partly revealed in naked ugliness; a scene constantly changing as the piragua blew steadily up the curving waters. New cliffs appeared, moved past, were gone in the enshrouding forest. In between them came glimpses of odd formations which held the eye a minute or two, then disappeared behind the slow-sliding foreground.

Suddenly the lax Jule Marden tensed, eyes widening. In one of the gaps had

appeared a rock more grotesque than any yet seen, a block, almost sheer-sided, topped by tall pinnacles resembling towers, chimneys, or blunt-tipped horns, whichever the mind of the beholder might fancy at first gaze. Black, like all the other stones, it stood high and bold on the summit of a conical hill cloaked in greenery; aloof from all neighboring formations, weird as a castle of ogre or demon, reared by sorcery in a land of insensate savagery. Three or four miles inland, it glowered in impotent menace at the river and the sailboat which, with contemptuous indifference, bore men in safety past its demesne.

Dussault's swift intake of breath proved that he, too, saw that uncanny formation. After a second or two of staring he snatched a pair of binoculars from the deck, swiftly focused, and sat with eyes glued to the lenses.

"Is that it, Rafe?" asked Jule, in guarded tones.

"By —— that is it!" avowed the other. "There can't be another like it in the world!"

"It fits the sketch all right, as near as I can remember. But it's not close to the water, as we thought, and it's a good bit smaller than you thought. All the same— Ramón!" Jule raised his voice, but preserved his careless drawl. "What is that queer thing yonder?"

"That? That with the towers? That, señor, is El Castillo del Diablo." The pilot squinted the sun-glare, unsmiling this time. "So it is called, and, *cra*, so it is! The Castle of the Devil, in truth. There is a demon in that place."

"Humph! You have many demons and saints and what-nots along this river," scoffed Jule. "How many sacred and infernal spots have you shown us?"

"No, no, no, no, señor!" rattled the protesting pilot. "There is truly a devil there! Those other places below here, where people say are saints or *demonios*, they are only spots blessed by some *padre* when the old missions existed, or where some evil thing has come about. But this *castillo*— *Cra*, no priest ever went into that place! And other men who have gone in have been snatched to hell and never seen again. It is a truth!"

Marden, poker-faced, gave a scornful grunt.

"Truth, señor!" insisted the riverman. "There are times when one can hear El Diablo himself growling over there—yes, hear him from this river. After a heavy rain he is heard most often; the devil does not like to be wet and cold, you know. And the men—it is well known hereabouts that several have gone in there but never come out. I myself knew two of them. Rodolfo Martinez and Moisé Ruiz, they were, two bold fellows who went in last year to 'watch the devil growl,' they said. And soon afterward the *demonio* did growl. And no man has laid eyes on Rodolfo or Moisé since that time."

Jule laughed indulgently.

"They fell off one of those cliffs on their way in, probably, or stepped on a snake or two," he derided. "There is no path, is there?"

Dussault, still studying the gradually vanishing castle, listened keenly for the reply to that seemingly careless question. It came promptly.

"But no, señor, they did not travel by land. It is not necessary. There is a creek, the Caño del Muerto, which leads from just behind that nearest Teta— Look! Yonder is the spot, though one can not see the stream itself from here. It leads back to the Castillo, or so men say. And Rodolfo and Moisé went up it in a *curial*. And that canoe never came out again, either."

"Uh-huh." Marden smiled, then achieved a yawn. His eyes, however, slid to the face of his partner, who gave no sign of having heard. Ramón, somewhat offended by the apparent incredulity accorded his tale, spat over the side and turned his back on the pair. The lean man looked backward, to find that all the mestizos now were awake and sitting up.

"Don't hog the glasses, Rafe," he admonished, reaching to grasp the binoculars. "It looks impolite, and all North

Americans are supposed to be models of courtesy, are they not? Yes, they are not. But besides, you're showing too much interest in that place. And furthermore, moreover, and in addition, I'd like a peek myself."

Rafe surrendered the twin tubes, glanced at the mestizos, and turned his gaze ahead, as if seeking some new point of interest. Jule altered the focus a trifle to fit his own vision and intently scanned the rock.

Already it was half concealed by the intervening shoulder of a precipitous low ridge. Inexorably that ridge inched downstream, narrowing vision until the Castillo was wiped from the scene. Remained only the inchoate jumble of broken hills and crawling green.

As Marden lowered the glasses the eyes of the two met. In each pair showed a triumphant smile, tempered by a touch of perplexity. Presently the yellow ones lifted toward the sun, now some three hours above the western horizon; the brown ones followed; then they met again.

"Well, now what?" queried Jule, quietly. "We're supposed to stick aboard till we reach that next town—Atures, isn't it?—a hundred miles up. But—" He paused.

Rafe studied the deck. When he looked up again his expression was crafty.

"We quit tonight," he muttered. "The moon is full now. And a canoe is trailing behind—a rotten thing, but it will do."

"Uh-huh. But our stuff is down in the hold, and if we move it somebody'll wake up."

"No." The amber gaze grew yet more sly. "I will see to that. At supper I shall make some tea and treat every one. But you and I won't drink ours. You will say you don't like it. I'll upset my cup by accident. Then all will sleep soundly. Am I clear to you?"

A long look, a slow smile, and a subdued chuckle from Jule.

"You old son-of-a-gun!" he grinned. "You figured on everything, didn't you?"

"I know my groceries," boasted Rafe, with a responding grin.

"I'll say you do!"

With that the thick man sprawled again on the planks, the thin one lolled once more, gazing ahead with external nonchalance. But the yellow eyes, unseen, flamed with the light of a dream half realized. The brown ones, previously so calm, held a touch of uneasiness, which came and went and came again, as they reverted momentarily to the prone Dussault.

The little ship blew on.

II

THE MOON rode low in the east; so low as to cast long, black shadows across the wide *playa*, yet high enough to have lost the visible speed of its first rising. Now, apparently motionless in a cloudless but slightly hazy sky, it stared at the bare-poled piragua, moored beside the sand-bank, and at the nine men lying not far apart, yet not in a compact group. The vessel, with sails furled and decks deserted, seemed to drowse peacefully beside the strand, like some queer waterbird with slim, straight horn standing from her back. The men dotting the warm sands appeared buried in sleep, unapprehensive of any menace of the night. Yet all was not as it looked.

Five mestizos, curled up in a close-drawn knot for companionship and for mutual warmth in the chillier hours to come, indubitably slept; for from them resounded a medley of incessant snores. The tiger-faced master and his personal satellite—the sixth mestizo, who daily officiated as helmsman—were not so patently unconscious. A couple of rods distant from the others, they lay silent but not altogether quiescent; for from time to time each altered his position. Between them, ready to hand, lay an old .44 Winchester and an unsheathed machete. Perhaps they were soundly asleep when they seemed partly awake; an observer would find it hard to determine.

The two remaining men of the party,

however, were still awake while they seemed asleep. Though Marden and Dussault rested without movement, their eyes were but half closed; and their postures were such that they could watch all their companions, without lifting their heads.

Perhaps an hour had passed since nightfall; and they were not yet ready to move. There was plenty of time—a good ten hours before dawn—and after the grilling

heat of the day it was pleasant to lounge in comparative coolness in the soft light of early night.

Already the quick-cooling sand had discharged most of its sun-heat into the air, and the damp breath of the river crept soothingly around bodies still languid despite the regular bath at sundown. Mere physical comfort would not, however, have held them there so long, on this night. They awaited only the complete dormancy of all their fellow-travelers before desertion.

"The dope's not very strong," Dussault had quietly explained as they lay down. "It's just a good, medium-strength opiate, not the regular K. O.—something I take myself sometimes when my nerves are shot. And it may work slowly on some of them. Especially Ramón, the boss. He is alert by nature, even when he sleeps, and he may not give in to it easily."

The occasional restless tossings of Ramón now proved that prediction well founded. The movements might be altogether subconscious, but the pair still waited. Meanwhile their minds ran in channels similar, if not in all respects identical, following the course created some time ago by the nature of their quest.

A STRANGE mission, this; the strangest on which Marden, at least, had ever embarked. It was a venture which, phoenix-like, had risen from the ashes of a venture dead. Where and how it would end neither of them yet knew, though hope and imagination, solidly backed by the appearance, today, of a long-sought actuality, depicted golden success. Its beginning, however, was easily recalled, for it was by no means long ago, though rather far away. The somewhat incongruous partnership had been formed two months ago in Tampa, Florida.

There Julian Marden, something of a drifter and dreamer, had come to a temporary mooring in the fall of 1925, borne in on the surging tide of Northerners seeking quick fortune from the new El Dorado of real estate. Like many another, he had come not to invest but to look around and pick up what he could in a land where pickings seemed marvelous—from the outside. From the inside, the possibilities for a newcomer soon appeared not so miraculous.

The ground swarmed with men of longer experience, working at high tension, among whom the competition was terrific. Moreover, a slight ebb of the tidal wave of investment was beginning to make itself felt, becoming more evident as the season lengthened. And Marden, though he soon managed to connect with a big company as salesman, was not a high-pressure man. For all that, he succeeded where some of the fast workers failed; his moderation and whimsical personality captured certain investors who resented buttonholing, brass-band tactics.

Thus he accumulated a snug little account in commissions—only to see most of it vanish into thin air.

Over night came a crash in which his company fell to pieces, leaving him and his associate salesmen whistling for commissions not yet paid, nor likely ever to be. More lucky or more prudent than some of his fellows, however, he had laid away some money before the catastrophe. His cash aggregated only a few hundreds; but those hundreds would carry him a long way across the world, if he cared to go.

It was at this juncture that Dussault broached the proposition which started the pair of them to traveling. Chance had thrown them together a number of times, and thereafter Dussault, a shrewd estimator of men, had brought about meetings which seemed fortuitous but were not. He had a purpose far back in his head, coupled with foresight in the front of it; and in Marden, he decided, he had found the man he needed. He himself was a rather odd mixture of nationalities, if one might judge by appearances.

He came from Louisiana, he had once said; a statement borne out by his French surname. Yet his Christian name —Raphael—he invariably spelled in the Italian manner—Raffaele. And, though he spoke both French and Italian well, his native tongue seemed Spanish; at least, he could converse naturally and fluently with the Cubans of the city, using their own idioms as if born to them, whereas he sometimes hesitated when employing any of his other three languages. For the rest, he was a smooth salesman, not too scrupulous in his regard for truth, if falsification would close a deal; also a gambler, a waster and something of a sybarite, who knew his own faults. When the right time came he candidly admitted those faults to Marden.

"I have something up my sleeve, Marden," he announced then, "which, if I can coax down into my hand, will make all this Florida game look like child's play. But to bring it down I need the help of another man, and I think you are the man. I've been watching you for some time. You're straight, and you have a level head. And that's what I need most. A man straight and level, with a little money. I've made much more money than you, but I never can keep it, though I've tried hard sometimes.

"The women and the whiskey and the cards take it away from me as fast as I get it. I am broke at this minute, or nearly so. I have perhaps a hundred left, and a girl I am taking out tonight will probably get most of it; they always do. And it will always be so, unless I take the right man and go to a certain place. By the time we come out again we shall both be rich, I hope, and I may have learned self-control. I can't learn it in civilization, where temptations are always at my elbow. Anyway, I want to go to that place now, and you're the man I want to go with. Now here is the proposition:

"There is a certain country, south of here, where the Spanish adventurers, centuries ago, hunted for gold and jewels. And some of them found what they hunted for. And there was a certain small party that deserted from a larger party, taking with them a big bag full of gold and precious stones—emeralds or diamonds, perhaps both; both are still found down there. These deserters were pursued, but they went ashore at a very desolate place—it was on a river—and hid themselves and their treasure.

"But the others blocked the river above and below and hunted them long and hard, so they couldn't break free. The big party never found them, but by this blockade they killed most of them. The deserters starved and fell sick and went mad and fought among themselves, until finally only one was left—and he lived by turning cannibal—"

He stopped short, as if the last few words had slipped from his tongue without volition. Marden's brows contracted, but he made no comment on the grim revelation. The narrator swiftly resumed his tale:

"That one managed to make his way

to the sea-coast, taking with him all the gold he could carry, but leaving all the stones. Those stones he hid in a spot where he could find them if he ever returned. But he never succeeded in returning. He died in Hispaniola, an island east of Cuba, about a thousand miles from here, nowadays called Santo Domingo. And I have every reason to believe, Marden, that those stones are right where he left them—waiting for us to come and get them!

"And my proposition is simply this: You stake me to the trip—and come along yourself to keep me from falling by the wayside—and we'll split fifty-fifty on what we find. Now how does that hit you?"

"As a story it hits me right between the eyes," grinned the listener. "But as a business proposition, there are a few essential details lacking."

"I know it. But I can produce them when I know you will sit into the game. Now I'm just telling you what the game is. It's a gamble, not a business proposition, but a cleaner gamble than a lot of business deals I've seen around here; no cut-throat work, but a square shot and an even break.

"Either we find the stones or we don't. Either we cash in big or we go broke. Success or failure, we share even. And be sure of one thing. I don't know just how much money you have, but I know it's not enough to tempt me to try a con game on you. I can make more out of the land suckers around here than I ever could from you."

That was true, Marden knew. Although Dussault was, like himself, unemployed at the moment, he could readily establish new connections and continue to hook the "suckers" still arriving on every train. And the man's frankness concerning his own shortcomings was a potent argument of sincerity. However—

"Why haven't you gone after this thing on your own, buddy, when you had plenty of cash?" probed Julian.

"I did," confessed the other, somewhat shamefaced. "I went to that country alone, and I got as far as the coast—and no farther. I had a drink, and a pretty woman smiled at me, and I slipped. And the slip became a slide, and the slide a fall, and I landed on the rocks, broke. The same old story. And I had to work my way back to the States as a deckhand. I can't go it alone, Marden. The fleshpots get me every time. That's why I need you."

"You're cursed by your fatal beauty, old horse," laughed Marden. "But I'm afraid you're adopting the wrong guardian. I like a drink and a girl pretty well myself—"

"But you don't let them get the better of you," the wastrel cut in. "That's what counts. I'll gamble on you—if you'll take a chance on me. What do you say?"

A moment of deliberation, during which Marden reviewed the tale of the fugitive adventurers. Then, impulsively:

"I'll go you! That is, if you'll put all your cards on the table."

"Good!" Dussault smiled. "Here they are:

"The country is Venezuela, the river is the Orinoco, and the spot where the stones were hidden is a strange rock called El Castillo del Diablo—Castle of the Devil. Just where that castle is I can't tell you, except that it must be far up the river. But it is beside the Orinoco, or near it, and we can find it by keeping our eyes open—and our mouths shut. We must ask no questions, give nobody the least hint that we are hunting for such a place. And when we do see it, it will look like this."

He had been sitting with a hand in a coat pocket. Now that hand emerged, unfolded a bit of old parchment, and displayed to Marden's eager gaze a crude sketch; the outline of a towered castle on a slanting base, its towers unequal in height and somewhat lopsided at top, its walls considerably out of plumb and jaggedly indented by niches and notches; the whole resembling a man-made fortress of olden time, left ruinous after some forgotten siege and capture. Below, in

labored characters, was scrawled the brief legend, "*Cast d Diavlo—Oronucu—Dias. . . .*"

The old tracing and lettering were faint; the number of dots—denoting days—indeterminate. And the clumsy chirography, the abbreviations amd misspellings, coupled with the unquestionable age of the worn parchment, gave the chart a compelling air of authenticity. Just such handiwork as this might be executed by a half-literate, hard-handed, Spanish soldier of fortune who had learned the value of preserving records of important points, but lacked skill of portrayal.

In its way it was canny enough, too, for it gave no hint of the existence of treasure. If lost or stolen, it would betray only the fact that somewhere up the "Oronucu" stood the formation depicted—a mere fact which probably was already known to other roving conquistadors.

"The record of the number of days is worthless, of course," said Dussault, watching with satisfaction the mounting glow in Marden's eyes. "It has faded out at the end. He evidently put down a dot for each day on his way out, but we don't know how he traveled, or even whether he put them all down. It must have been a tough trip, and he may have slipped in keeping the tally. But that doesn't matter."

"Where did you get this?" demanded Marden.

"That doesn't matter either. But—I have been in Hispaniola."

Marden eyed him oddly a moment, then smiled.

"All right. I'll bet there was a woman somewhere in the deal, Signor Lothario, but that's your own guilty secret. But how do you know somebody hasn't beaten us to it?"

"Well, I don't. But I have good reason to believe nobody has. Otherwise I'd never go after it. I like my fleshpots too well."

Marden smiled again, easily convinced on that point, for he knew something about the life Dussault led in Tampa. Thereafter, wholly committed to the project, he broached the subject of ways and means. Dussault, who evidently had studied travel routes, outlined the easiest itinerary and the probable expense.

"We must travel cheap and light," he added. "No guns, except a good revolver apiece. We might need those—after we get the stones—and we can smuggle them in under our clothes. No beds or cots; we can buy hammocks down there. For clothes we need only what we wear here, with some cheap khaki and a brown sunhelmet. Food we'll buy at some river-town. I have good binoculars; we'll take them along. Nothing else—except small personal stuff, of course. And you'd better memorize this sketch. I know it by heart, every line of it, and I'm going to leave it here in safe deposit. If we don't get those stones, nobody else shall."

True to his word, he had banked that parchment before leaving Tampa. And since that time he had not once mentioned it, or the place it depicted, within the hearing of any one who could understand. Neither had Marden.

ON THEIR way down to Venezuela, via the Antillean islands, they had posed as commercial travelers. On arrival at Ciudad Bolívar, metropolis of the Orinoco, they had altered their rôle to that of representatives of an American company interested in *sarrapia*—the tonca bean, one of the staple exports of the river, valuable in manufacture of perfumery because of its fragrant content of coumarin.

As the seed-collecting season was just opening and an excellent tonca section lay far upstream, this explanation of their object not only passed muster but procured them passage on the piragua of Ramón, himself a petty dealer in *sarapia*, along with the mestizos whom he was about to put to work in his chosen district. And now, with the half-mythical Castillo del Diablo actually found, they lay on the sand waiting for the right moment for them to vanish into the night.

Thus far, Dussualt had behaved very well, considering his character. Yet he

had proved that his unsparing self-analysis in Tampa was essentially correct. By his suggestion, Marden had been treasurer and paymaster throughout the trip, holding a tight grip on their thin fund. But in four towns on their way—in Port-of-Spain, in Ciudad Bolívar, in Caicara and, very recently, in the village of Urbana—Dussault had pleaded, cajoled, threatened, and raged in endeavors to borrow from that fund enough money to buy such pleasures as he craved. Marden had been immovable.

Afterward, with the town temptations left behind, Dussault had approved his stand and apologized. Nevertheless he had grown moody, sometimes sullen, sometimes touchy, sometimes over-gay and effusively cordial.

Marden, imperturbable, had attributed these vagaries to the workings of Latin temperament, repression of appetites never hitherto denied, and sun. But now, as he watched and thought, he felt disquieted. His mind kept reverting to the drugging of the tea, and more particularly to the deftness with which it had been accomplished.

This was not the first time Dussault had doped a drink, he felt. And, despite the casual explanation of occasional insomnia, the possession of that sporific seemed a bit odd. In all the long journey to this spot, Dussault had never shown inability to sleep. On the contrary, he had always seemed a better sleeper than Marden. His professed nervousness, therefore, looked not quite plausible. And he could hardly have foreseen the necessity of drugging seven men up here.

Then why had he brought the opiate with him? The answer was so obvious that Marden scowled—and turned from it.

"Cut that out!" he rebuked himself. "He's all right. He's taken that stuff on the sly when he needed it, and you never knew it, that's all. If he'd been crooked he'd have brought something stronger—chloral or chloroform."

He sat abruptly, jerking his head and twitching his shoulders as if to shake off the clutch of an invisible demon of suspicion. Thereupon Dussault also rose on an arm.

"Cold?" he asked in ordinary conversational tone. "I'm a trifle chilly myself."

He nudged his partner, nodding toward Ramón. Both watched for signs of awaking. None came. Ramón was lying unmoved. Nobody else stirred.

"Say, Ramón!" called Dussault.

No answer. No movement. The mestizos snored steadily on.

Another nudge. Both stood up. Dussault walked over and looked sharply at each man. Marden picked up the ponchos on which they had lain.

"All right," announced the drugger, with an infectious chuckle. "Sweet sleep reigns supreme. Let's go!"

III

DOWN the dark bosom of the river floated a black dugout, manned fore and aft by slow-stroking men, whose painstaking manipulation of the banjo-shaped paddles betrayed unfamiliarity with such heavy, ill-balanced watercraft, though their unison of movement and freedom from clumsiness betokened experience with canoes of more modern make. Amidships rested a low mound of equipment—two small locker-trunks, three short cases of canned food, a couple of strong sacks, the ponchos and a few metal dishes.

Before and behind the blunt-ended boat lay moonlit water, and all around brooded the shadowy mystery of Orinocan night, stealthily quiet, yet not silent; for scattered sounds came from the shore growth, some softly murmurous, some harshly abrupt, telling of nocturnal woo-ings or combats among the furred and feathered folk.

Vanished from sight now were the piragua, the *playa*, and the seven swarthy men who lay in unbroken rest; all swallowed up by distance and intervening curves of the river-course. Back there all was as it had been, except that the recumbent forms were fewer by two, the canoe

had disappeared from the stern, and the baggage of the señores from the hold, and the weathered mast now displayed a small white square which had not been there at sunset. That white patch was a sheet of paper, tied on with slender cords, and bearing in large print the message:

> Ramón: Pardon us for borrowing your curial. We return to Urbana. There are certain señoritas at that place—You comprehend. Good-by for a time.

This was the handiwork of Dussault, who, grinning, explained as he affixed it where it would surely be found:

"That will stop him from coming after us. He's in a hurry to carry these *sarrapieros* up to his grounds and put them to work, anyway. And when he finds that we've taken nothing but the rotten old canoe, and reads this, it will be a howling joke to him—the señores dashing madly away by moonlight for love of some girls down the river. Anything of that sort tickles these fellows to death. He will expect us to come on and attend to business, when we've tired of our girls. So he will keep right on to Atures."

"You're a great little fixer," laughed Marden. "But doesn't it look a bit fishy that we take all our stuff with us when we go to visit our lady friends?"

"Not at all. It just shows that we're wise travelers. Down here, you keep a tight grip on everything you own. If you don't, you don't own it long."

So, virtually insured against pursuit and, more important, against suspicion as to their actual destination, they had pushed out into the current. And now, distrustful of their warped and cranky river-burro, they let that current do most of the work. Fancy leaped ahead, to the mysterious creek behind the Tetas, up that stream to the castle, and up the stark sides of that stone, to a heap of stones more precious. But reason and caution held their impatient bodies under restraint.

With unceasing vigilance Dussault, in the bow, watched the water for signs of any submerged rock, low-floating tree-trunk, stealthily swimming crocodile, or other menace to safe passage. Equally watchful, Marden steered and stroked, in obedience to his partner's motions, yet gave subconscious attention to everything else about him; and his nerves, usually calm, thrilled repeatedly.

The wildness, the vastness of this untamed region, the animal noises to right and left, the splashes of leaping fish, the dank smells, floating from nowhere, the staring moon, the feel of stolen canoe and paddle, the vivid memory of that eerie rock glowing from its hillock—these worked on all his senses, corporeal and spiritual. This was romance, adventure, life!

Dussault, too, felt that exaltation. After they had been under way for some time he slyly asked:

"Getting any kick out of this, Jule? Or would you rather be selling under-water lots to simps in Florida?"

"Man, you make another crack like that and I'll crown you!" responded Marden. "Florida? Blah!"

Dussault's thick chuckle shook the canoe.

HOURS crept past, sluggish as the current, measured only by the height of the moon. Neither man looked at his watch. Already, while voyaging on the piragua, they had adopted the riverman's habit of gauging time by the sky. The moon had reached the zenith, indicating approximate midnight, when the wallowing dugout nosed its way in close to shore, a mile above the enormous bulk of the nearer Teta. Somewhere along there, Ramón had said, opened the sinister Caño del Muerto—Dead Man's Creek—where men went in, but came not out.

Slowly, hampered by shore eddies, they coasted down the margin of rock and sand. The Teta loomed nearer, higher, and still no opening appeared. They began to scowl. Had Ramón been only weaving a wild tale for the entertainment of the foreign señores, when he told of that fearsome road to the Devil's Castle? It

looked so. But at length, when the great black side of the Teta seemed only a gunshot away, the water curved about a rock-jumble and a narrow stream detached itself from the river, leading off inland between sloping sand-banks and disappearing among thick timber.

At sight of that ill-omened water, both men involuntarily held their paddles, peering at the depths of darkness, awaiting them beyond the expanse of rock-studded sand. Dussault slid a hand to the butt of the short, but strong-shooting, police revolver now holstered at his belt. Marden, similarly armed, glanced down at his weapon but did not touch it. Their hesitation was but momentary. Then the paddle moved again and the curial swam up into the mouth of the creek.

At half the distance to the trees they slowed their strokes by tacit consent, glancing at the sand on either side.

"Seems to me, Rafe, that we'd better stop here for the rest of the night," suggested Marden. "We can't make much headway through those woods before daylight, and meanwhile I could use some sleep. And here's a perfectly good bed lying wide open to us."

"Just what I was thinking," agreed the bowman. "We can move on at sunrise and get under cover before anybody—*Diantre!* What's that?"

One of the low black rocks at the right was moving. Then another stirred, and another. The startled beholders snatched at their revolvers—but did not draw. More of the squat stones had come to life; a dozen, a score, on both sides, were moving to the water. But from each of them protruded a blunt head and stubby legs. Scrambling at their best speed down the slant shores, they slid into the protecting darkness of the creek, and were gone.

"Turtles," grunted Dussault, disgustedly lifting hand from his weapon. "I'm a fine specimen of a soldier of fortune, to grab for a gun at sight of those poor belly-scrapers. Guess I need a drink."

"They gave me a jolt too," confessed Marden. "Our imaginations are keyed up too high. Well, come on. Let's get ashore and bury our fool heads in the sand. Then we'll be safe, all same ostrich."

A few strokes, and the deep-riding craft grounded in a shallow beside the sand. They debarked; lifted the ponderous prow with united strength, and ran it well up on the shore; drew the ponchos from the duffle pile, walked a few yards up the gentle slope, and spread the rubberized sheets on the ground. A slow look all around—at vacant sand, at jutting rocks, at inscrutable trees and naked Teta—and they lay down.

"So far, so good." Dussault stretched his hirsute arms high overhead. "Nothing to do till tomorrow, and safe as a couple of sand-fleas. The moon will last till daybreak, and Ramón said no *tigre* ever walks a *playa* in the light. No croc' will bother us this far from the water. The canoe can't get away. So—"

He paused suddenly. Not far downstream sounded the barking of a dog.

"Umph! Not so good!" he grumbled. "Somebody must be living down there by that Teta, and if that yapping mutt smells us—"

They listened. Apparently the mongrel did smell them, for he continued to voice alarm. A circling current of air, perhaps, was carrying to his nostrils some faint man-scent which, being unfamiliar, worried him. After a time, however, he either wearied of his vociferation or lost the strange odor, as the breeze changed. His noise died out.

"Nobody will come snooping around at this time of night," declared Marden. "And we'll move at the first crack of day. Probably it's just a camp of turtle-eggers waiting for the grand rush. Next week, isn't it?"

"Yes. And in the meantime they have nothing to do but stick their noses into anything that looks interesting. And if one of them gets wind of our sneaking in here, he'll yelp the news like that mutt. And just at this time there's more than one kind of egg-gathering along this section, I've heard; turtle eggs, and tough

eggs with knives. Let them get a whiff of loot and—"

He left the prediction significantly incomplete. For a few seconds Marden looked sober. Then his long face crinkled in a joyous laugh.

"Maybe it would be your old yarn repeated, Rafe. Remember? The deserters hemmed in and hunted, and all that. We're deserters too. And for all we know, some of your tough eggs may be descendants of the original blockaders. Those old Spaniards left a whole flock of half-breed descendants wherever they went, didn't they? It'd be a funny thing if history repeated itself here."

Dussault grunted, with no note of merriment. His eyes moved from side to side, scanning the *playa* anew. Marden, too, took another look around, his expression again growing serious. As moments passed and the serenity of the night remained unbroken, they relaxed. Heads on arms, they lay wordless.

The moon swung steadily into the west. Shadows lengthened across the sand. Beasts and birds, which had loved and fought and slain earlier in the night, were quiet. Damp chill thickened on earth and water. At length, a faint pallor crept up in the east. Suddenly it was day, and from the interminable shore-forest rose a harsh medley of unhuman noises.

Marden sat up, slapped his partner lightly on the shoulder, and straightened to his feet. Dussault started, stared wildly an instant, then lifted himself, frowsy and heavy-faced. As they picked up their ponchos both suddenly scowled. From the direction of the Teta sounded again the voice of the dog.

"Out of here!" tersely commanded Dussault, eyeing the black dome against the reddening sky. Whatever lay at its base was invisible from their sleeping-place, the view being intercepted by rocks and bush. There could be little doubt, however, that somewhere in there, stood a palm-hut or two, tenanted by human beings. The dog, emboldened by day, might even now be inciting some man to follow him over there.

They strode to the water's edge, flung the bedsheets aboard, heaved together, and refloated the dugout; clambered in, and paddled hastily toward the concealment of the trees. No rocks arose in their way, and a few minutes later they drew into the shadowy solidity of the woods, and were gone from the sight of all men.

Gone, yes; but not gone without a trace. Back on the sand where they had stayed, and at the shore where they had twice lifted their heavy boat, remained plain imprints of feet. And those tracks were not those of bare soles, such as might be left by Indians, nor of the flat *alpargatas* — sandals — customarily worn by most Venezuelans. They were the distinctive impressions of rubber-soled shoes with clean-cut heels; the shoes of North American *señores*.

IV

DEAD MAN'S CREEK showed its teeth before the invaders had penetrated inland half a mile.

Beyond a curve they found themselves confronted by jagged spikes of reddish rock which, projecting a yard above the surface, grinned with the malevolence of bloodstained fangs. Through the gaps among these, the water poured with snaky silence, and below, it circled in miniature whirlpools, harmless but suggestive, as they sucked down floating bits of leaf and twig.

Here, too, the tiny but insatiable mosquitoes, which had been gradually gathering, assumed the proportions of a swarm, stealthily attacking necks and ears and hands, to bite like fiery needles, and leave in each puncture a maddening itch.

"The plot thickens," remarked Marden, surveying the barrier and slapping at bugs. "We could use dynamite and headnets, if we had them—especially the nets. And I can use some coffee and a few eats right now."

"I agree in all particulars," affirmed Dussault, swinging the bow shoreward.

Dry driftwood lay all about the slopes of the ravine, and soon a fire was heating the coffee, while the thin smoke partly dispelled the bloodthirsty insects. No time or work was devoted to cooking food. A can of salmon and a package of crackers—both bought at Ciudad Bolívar, but imported from the States—sufficed as edibles. While they ate and drank and smoked they said nothing at all. Their eyes rested frequently on the stony pales through which they soon must struggle—but not there alone. Their gaze ranged on up the umbrageous watercourses, as if seeking some lurking danger.

After weeks of travel on wide waters, they now felt hemmed in, surrounded and watched by invisible beings, hostile to their intrusion. Small creeping sounds, low mutterings, movements of leaves untouched by breeze, all combined to create an eerie sensation of espionage. Both realized that the unseen life about them must be merely that of inoffensive little woods-dwellers; but neither felt at ease—though neither admitted it.

When at length Marden spoke, his tone was casual and his subject practical.

"Looks as if we had our work cut out for us, Rafe. This road may be smooth and simple in the wet season, when it's ten or fifteen feet higher, but now it's something else again. And if it squirms around a lot, as looks likely, we may be all day in reaching our Castillo."

"Croaking won't get us there," replied Dussault, a bit sourly.

Marden frowned slightly, and his good-humored lips tightened. Without retort, he picked up the coffee-pot and stepped to the canoe. Dussault, looking a little ashamed of his testy answer, followed.

Once more aboard, they pushed the dugout toward the widest gap in the red teeth. It proved broad enough to clear the sides; but a submerged rock denied free draught. After an interval of poking and measuring, they undressed and slid overboard. Finding footing on other rocks, they lifted the boat and inched it ahead, cautiously avoiding any hasty slide, or sudden drop, of the water-rotted wood on the waiting jaw of stone. When at last it lay safe in deeper water, both its masters were panting from the repeated strains.

"Rotten old tub!" wheezed Dussault. "If it holds together till we reach the castle, we'll be lucky. It will never bring us out again."

"Who's croaking now?" Marden smiled, but thinly.

"I am. So the score stands even"

Dussault grinned wide, and his partner's eyes twinkled again. They lay down, side by side, on slants of rock, nearly submerging themselves, to rest and grow cool in the current. As they took their ease they cast slow glances over the visible portions of each other's frame.

"Where did you ever pick up all that muscle, Jule?" quizzed Dussault. "You're the most deceptive cuss I ever laid eye on. When you're dressed nobody would ever suspect you were so thick in the arms and shoulders. But when you take a bath you look like Bob Fitzsimmons."

"Gym work," laconically explained the tall man. "Took it up when I was a kid and kept it up long after I was grown. But my legs never would fill out—too lengthy to take on meat, I guess. And my bones are small. If I had a dreadnought frame like yours I might be of some use at lifting things—canoes and so on."

"You handled your end all right." Dussault glanced down at his own heavily built, black-furred torso. "And I'm not much good as an uplifter. Too much belly."

The other grinned and eyed him uncertainly, wondering whether his reference was merely to his somewhat protuberant abdomen, or also to the carnal nature which had bloated him. His comments sometimes held a Latin subtlety, capable of double meaning. After a minute Marden answered in kind.

"You've got plenty of guts. Take that any way you like. And now we'd better move on."

He drew up his long legs, preparatory to rising, but abruptly halted movement.

Dussault, reaching a hand toward a rock spur just behind, started convulsively and stiffened. His arm groped weakly and fell. His face blanched, his eyes dilated, his lips twisted without sound. Then he straightened and slid limply down the sloping stone, a dazed horror stamped on his face. He was going under.

For a second Marden squatted in petrified amazement. Then, as the water rose over his partner's open mouth, he seized him by the hair. Instantly a blow from some unseen quarter smote his arm, numbing it to the shoulder. His hold loosed. But, as Dussault's terrified eyes rolled dully to him, he scrambled up, threw a leg around one of the stone fangs, clutched both fists into the black hair, and heaved.

Another blow numbed his fresh arm, but not so forcibly. Dussault emerged, hands fluttering feebly, legs twitching, to hang, gasping, on the rock tooth against which Marden threw him.

From his throat gurgled an inarticulate warning. His head jerked toward the water where he had lain. Peering sharply, Marden perceived below the surface a repulsive creature, dull-colored, serpentine, slow, cold-eyed, thick as his own leg and several feet long, wriggling toward him.

He jumped back. From the canoe beside him he pulled a paddle. Swinging it overhead, he struck downward, blade edgewise. The blunt head of the water-demon was near his own feet now, and the blow landed just behind it. The head was driven down. Beyond the splash of the paddle the slimy body jerked up into sight, squirmed, sank. As the paddle swung high and poised again, the broken creature went writhing through the nearest gap and into the eddies below the reef. It disappeared.

"Rafe!" gasped the rescuer. "Did it bite you? Show me the place quick!"

"Agh—ugh—*no 'sta culebra*," coughed Dussault, brokenly regaining his voice. "No snake—*temblador*—eel."

"Eel!"

Dussault nodded, coughed again, and struggled to rise. Marden extended a hand, lifted and steadied him. He nodded again, toward the canoe, and stiffly scrambled in its direction, lurching as if drunk.

"Get aboard. May be more," he prompted. He fell into the hollow log, nearly capsizing it. Marden, after another wary but fruitless look below the surface, climbed in after him.

"Eel?" he repeated incredulously. "And it didn't even bite? Then what the—"

"Electric eel," explained Dussault, still pale, but sitting up and rubbing his legs. "They don't bite. Touch you with their nose. Knock you stiff. You drown. Then they eat you. One got me years ago in—another place. I was on land then. Washing my hands at a river's edge. He just touched my fingers. Knocked me flat. But I fell backward on the ground. So he missed his meal. This time, in the water all over, I got a —— of a jolt. Paralyzed me. Knew what it was, but couldn't move. Horrible sensation to know you're going under and can't stop. Ugh!"

He shuddered violently, looking over the side. No more snaky forms were in sight.

"Much obliged, Jule," he added.

"Oh, forget it. I couldn't let you slide out with all this work ahead," lightly evaded Marden. "And I got a real kick out of it."

He rubbed his arms, which still felt rather heavy.

"You got it too, did you? Hm! Must have gone right through me, then. I think he gave me another jolt, just when you grabbed me. They can give five or six shocks before the battery's used up."

Marden made no answer, and for a minute or more they sat rubbing. Then, becoming aware of the stings of mosquitoes, they pulled on enough clothing to serve as defense. That done, Dussault picked up his paddle and resumed his place in the bow.

"I wonder," said Marden then, "if that eel, or some others like him, could account for the fellows who came in here before us."

"No, I don't believe it, Jule." Dus-

sault spoke less jerkily now. "In the first place, those fellows must have come in when the water was deeper and the trip easier, and they wouldn't have to get overboard. And besides that, eels don't eat canoes. The canoe of that last pair never came out, remember. There's something else up here that we'll have to watch out for. Well, let's go."

He sunk his paddle and pulled hard. The canoe grudgingly moved. Marden shoved against the nearest rock, and they floated away, picking up speed, with united strokes.

FROM that time onward they concentrated attention on the all-important problem of progress, giving no notice to the movements of the small creatures along their way. The attack and defeat of a real danger seemd to have banished all imaginary perils, and solidified their determination to conquer this inhospitable stream and all of its denizens.

Now that its barrier had been penetrated and its ambushed guard slain, the Caño del Muerto appeared to have given over its resistance to invasion; the road ahead lay open, though impeded here and there by rounded bowlders.

At times the voyagers found it necessary, at some abrupt turn, to step out on stones, and swing the dugout carefully by hand. The water, however, remained always deep enough to float it through with little difficulty. On the other hand, the creek-bed proved exceedingly tortuous, winding haphazardly among steep, bush-clad slopes, sheer clay banks, and occasional stark precipices of stone.

Noon found the pair still laboring toward their goal, and that goal not yet in sight. For that matter, nothing else was in sight, nor had been, except the eternal walls on either side and the short stretches of curving, rock-studded water, ahead and behind. View was always blocked in every direction by the steep slants of earth or stone surmounted by verdure. And the distance to the castle, approximately three miles by air line from the river, had been multiplied by the windings of the creek to at least double, perhaps triple.

Hunger and fatigue forced a halt. They pushed their canoe into a convenient berth, between stones at the shore edge, then drooped on their paddles for a time, too tired to talk.

Their recent occupations in Florida—particularly those of Dussault—had hardly been the best training for shoving a clumsy curial up miles of stony water, in equatorial heat, and weeks of inaction on ocean and river craft had softened them still more. Now Marden's muscles ached; so did his head. Dussault felt utterly used up, and his physical discomfort did not improve his mental poise. When breath returned he swore bitterly at the sluggish craft, which had cost so much toil to propel to this point, and must be forced farther.

Marden listened with an appreciative smile, for he, too, was satiated with that sort of work. But he refrained from comment. Food and tobacco, he knew, would revive body and spirit. So, when he had cooled sufficiently to find appetite, he opened tins of beef and beans, halved the contents in enamelware plates, and ate. Dussault needed no urging to follow his example. And when cigarets were aglow, both rested in comfort, marred only by the mosquitoes.

"Cheer up, Blackbeard, old pirate!" rallied Marden. "We must be almost halfway there."

"Halfway! If we're no nearer than that—"

Then Dussault caught the other's grin and suspended his wrathful protest; rubbed a palm across his black-stubbled jaw, grinned in response, and countered:

"All right, Captain Kidder. By the way, I was just thinking that a good climber with plenty of muscle—like you—and no heavy belly—like mine—could get a fine view from the top of that high cliff up ahead. Now what do you think of that?"

Marden contemplated the cliff designated, the face of a gable-shaped ridge, bare-topped, which looked not too difficult

of ascent. When his cigaret was finished, he reached for his paddle.

"I'm sold on that idea," he announced. "Let's pull up there."

They worked up to the nearer slope of the gable. The naked rock-face proved too steep and smooth for easy climbing, but the tree-clad slope adjoining seemed to present few difficulties. Marden went ashore, and Dussault waited.

As the brown-eyed man disappeared in the brush the yellow-eyed one grinned again and lay back in complete relaxation. His eyes did not close, however. They dwelt on the slope where Marden moved, now lost to sight, but not yet lost to sound. Cracklings of dead leaves, a few louder cracks of dry brush, broken in passage, marked his progress. Then these died out.

Dussault turned his gaze up-creek, and his expression grew exultant, then coldly calculating. But soon he scowled, looked down at the water as if seeing there another *temblador*, and continued to stare at it—perhaps re-living his stunning shock and swift rescue. Thereafter he lay in narrow-lidded thought.

MEANWHILE, Marden climbed steadily, though deliberately, weaving from side to side in line of least resistance, through the pathless verdure. Once he met a snake, but it was small and inoffensive, crawling unhurried away. At length he emerged on naked stone, smitten by the full glare of the noonday sun, but swept by a welcome breeze. There, after one glance about, he stood, staring.

The Castillo del Diablo, so long invisible, stood in plain sight now, much nearer than before—but in the wrong direction. It had been approximately southeast from the mouth of the *caño*, off to the right of its seekers. Now it had betaken itself into the northeast, away to their left. And there it scowled, larger and blacker than ever, at the surprized man who had detected its evasion. When that man realized the reason for its shift in location he scowled back at it, then down at the creek.

Serpentinely stealthy as the slimy fish which had defended its mouth, that stream had led the explorers far from their objective, wearing out their strength in a labyrinth.

"A pox on you, and a murrain, and whatever else the old-timers used to cuss by, you sneak!" he execrated. "If we'd gone ashore a mile or two back, we might have found a direct route overland, and cut you in two. But we'll get there yet, whether you like it or not! Or you either!"

This last defiance was directed at the Castillo. Then he gave his attention again to the *caño*, trying to trace its further meanderings. In this he failed. Below him it curved back toward the left again, but lost itself behind another obtruding hill.

Again he eyed the castle, studying it narrowly, but learned nothing new. Except for its increase in size and a few differences in formation, it was as when seen from the river. Toward that river he now turned his survey, finding its water empty, so far as visible. Upstream it disappeared behind big stones, downstream behind the mammoth Tetas.

As he scanned the huge domes he squinted hard, trying unsuccessfully to identify something on the nearer. At its topmost height was a tiny projection, noticeable against the sky, and, as incongruous, on the otherwise smooth ellipse, as a sliver sticking from an unbroken egg.

Memory said that this slender protrusion had not been up there yesterday. But it seemed fixed, a part of the stone. A long look at it failed to detect motion or to reveal its character. A man, perhaps? Doing what? Dussault's binoculars might have settled the questions; but he had forgotten to bring them up here. Well, if it was a man he must be watching for some boat, expected from down-river. But probably it was just a rock stub which had gone unnoticed yesterday. With that guess Marden moved downward into the trees, returning to the canoe.

Soon after he disappeared, the spot on the Teta also moved down out of sight.

IT WAS about four o'clock—the time when the tropical canoe-traveler must begin to watch for a camp-site—when the partners terminated their wearisome wanderings on the Caño del Muerto. Beside them rose the pyramidal hill, on the crest of which stood the Castillo del Diablo.

For once, the view was not wholly obstructed by waterside trees and brush. In the course of some bygone rain a landslip had cleared a wide gap in the greenery on the castle side of the *caño*, leaving clean-swept stone. Up this naked acclivity the newcomers looked at their goal—to find little prospect of speedy conquest now that they had arrived.

"Well, here we are, and there it is," wearily announced Marden. "And I don't spy a single diamond or emerald or ruby anywhere on it. And I'm too tired to climb up there and pick 'em, if they hung in clusters. Where did old 'Last Survivor' park that plunder of his, do you know? On the castle, or in the castle, or under the castle, or where?"

"I don't know." Dussault spoke slowly, his voice more throaty than ever from fatigue, but his gaze fixed hungrily on the legendary depository of loot. "It is here somewhere. We must hunt."

"Uh-huh. Well, you go and hunt if you like. I'm not going to drag my poor, tired dogs up that hill till tomorrow. I'm about done up, and sleep, sweet sleep, is the only treasure I crave until yon sun rises again. And yon sun is sneaking away from us every minute, and the sooner we build us a home on our shore-front real estate, the better."

Dussault frowned at the suggestion of more work, but acknowledged the necessity by turning his gaze around and rearward.

"This place will do," he designated, nodding sidewise. "Stick up the tent in this bare space. Never mind hammocks; they'll require extra poles. We can sleep on the ground; it's dry, and the tent's snake-proof. There's a good sandy place right over there."

"Good enough," acquiesced Marden. "For tonight, anyway. Let's be at it, before we stiffen up."

With another speculative look at the Castillo, he arose and lifted one of the stout sacks from the canoe. This, after a survey of the gravelly floor of the inlet, he carried to the sandy patch, where he opened it and shook out a pair of Venezuelan hammocks and a thin, but strong, tent.

Dussault, slower to move, surveyed the treasure rock a minute longer; then, with a grunt of exertion, got up and began his share of the unloading. Tired though they were, neither had any intention of leaving any of their meager but vital equipment in the boat over night. Mysterious disappearances had been too numerous up here.

When the dugout had been emptied and drawn up on shore Dussault walked away, hatchet in hand, to cut tent-poles and firewood. The steep shores of the dry pocket offered plenty of the latter, for dead trees of various sizes hung head downward from roots still partly fixed in the upper earth.

Light, straight, strong poles suitable for the support of their cloth house, though, were not so easily located. The searcher walked back along the floor of the cove, scanning the green growth above. Soon he passed from sight behind one of the bowlders which cumbered the open ground. Minutes passed, and he did not reappear.

Marden, making arrangements for cooking a pot of rice and salt fish, gave little attention to his companion's movements. Presently, however, he began to look around and listen. No strokes of the hatchet had yet sounded. He opened his mouth to call. But just then the absentee made his whereabouts known.

"Hey, Jule! Come here!"

The summons betrayed excitement, but not alarm. It sounded some distance back beyond the rocks. Marden wasted no time in questions. He went at a run.

About a hundred yards in, near the end of the inlet, he found Dussault standing at the top of the bank, which at that point

was sloping. Lying at an odd angle on that slope was what seemed a short, smooth, dark log. Above it, where Dussault waited, trees stood thick, with little undergrowth.

"What's up?" demanded Marden.

"Look at this, and come up here."

Dussault pointed at the log, then gestured backward. Marden, starting ascent, paused. The log was but half a log; split, hollowed out, and tapered at the ends; a dugout canoe, thinly caked with dried mud, held on the slanting earth by a patch of tough bush below and a rigid rope tied to a small tree above. Its story was plain at a glance. Men had tethered it there in the last flood season—and never again used it. Later the water had drained out and left it stranded.

"Hm!" muttered Marden, resuming motion. At the top, Dussault pointed to a small ruin which had been a crude hut.

A few poles, sagging or broken, with brown fragments of a plantain-leaf roof, stood awry between two sizable trees. From a corner-post hung the rotted remnant of a palm-cord hammock, the other end of which lay loose on the ground.

Near it lay two paddles, worm-eaten; a repeating rifle of old model, red with rust; an equally rusty machete; a couple of dirty straw sombreroes; all scattered in confusion as if dropped in sudden fight or flight. A few feet away were coals of a long-dead fire, the once-black char bleached to dull gray by rains. That was all. Of the men who had camped there no other trace remained.

"This is where those fellows Rodolfo and Moisé stopped last year, beyond a doubt," declared Dussault, his gaze roving all about. "That is their canoe that never came out. These are their things. Looks as if they had a fight, doesn't it? Killed each other, maybe. Or else something killed both of them, or scared them so they ran and got hurt and died."

"Something sudden happened, that's clear." Marden frowned thoughtfully. "Let's look around a bit."

They moved in under the trees, scanning the ground, which grew more bare of bush as they worked inland. For twenty minutes or more they circled all about the camp, finding no human bones, no other relic of tragedy. Outside a radius of fifty feet from the hut, in fact, there was no sign that men had ever visited the spot.

"They didn't kill each other," asserted Marden. "And they weren't scared out. Scared men would jump into the canoe and cut the rope. These chaps would use their weapons, too. A couple of bold fellows, Ramón said they were, who came up here just to see the devil growl. They had nerve. They'd fight. And what knocked down this shack? It didn't break down itself. And what tore that hammock loose? And where's the other hammock? There should be two."

"Not necessarily. Two men can sleep in one hammock if it's big enough. That's a large one—or was."

"Well, yes, that's so. Probably that's the answer. Both used the same hammock. But—"

Marden paused, rubbing his stubbly jaw in perplexity as he surveyed the scene again. Then he cast a quick glance toward the ominous Castillo; stooped, picked up the rifle, and turned away.

"I'm getting superstitious, Rafe, and I'm going back to camp before our stuff disappears, too," he announced. "Come on. Yank a pole or two out of that wreck; they'll do."

He descended the bank, pausing again beside the forlorn canoe. It seemed not to have been cracked by the sun, and looked a much better boat than that in which they had come up the creek. Dussault, after wrenching three of the best hut-poles loose from their bush-rope fastenings, came after him. Unspeaking, they hurried back to their camp-site. There they found all as Marden had left it.

In silence they erected the tent, stowed their baggage inside, got firewood, cooked and ate; then bathed and donned dry, clean clothes. Reinvigorated, albeit lame and languid, they lolled before the tent door, discussing the mystery that they

had uncovered but not solved. Marden, attempting to open the rifle and thus learn whether it had been fired, found breechbolt and lever rusted into immobility. He threw it aside.

Dussault, at intervals in their fruitless converse, repeatedly opened and shut a long clasp-knife as if deriving comfort from the touch of stout steel.

Both, while talking and while silent, watched the black bulk across the creek, towering more ominously above them as twilight deepened and shadows thickened. With the last camp of lost men behind them and that demoniac castle before them, they felt the nearness of a nameless, bodiless, merciless spirit of malevolence, implacably awaiting its time to destroy them. And in their talk was no note of levity.

"Something got those two fellows, and something may try to get us," Marden summed up. "What it is, we won't know until we see it—if then. And I'm telling you right now, Rafe, if I wake up and see anything halfway suspicious between now and morning I'm shooting on sight. If you get up in the night for any reason whatever, wake me up first, before you even stand up. If I come to life, and find anything at this tent door, I'm asking no questions and spending no time watching it. I'll kill it first and look at it afterward. That's fair warning."

"My sentiments exactly," coincided Dussault. "Tonight and every night we're in here—if we stay more than one night—you make sure I'm awake before you stir around. And, now that I think of it, we'd better move our camp if we don't find our treasure tomorrow. A sudden hard rain would make this place bad."

"Rain? It's the dry season."

"I know. But we're in the hill country now, and up here it rains when it likes, Ramón was telling me. Those high mountains, away to the east and south, breed squalls and there may be a deluge any time, and half a night of rain may lift these creeks six feet or more, he said. And we're not more than two feet above water now. Well, let's turn in."

Yawning heavily, he turned about and, on all fours, crawled inside. Marden, though little less sluggish, stood up, to look slowly and searchingly at everything around the camp. The short tropic twilight now was rapidly yielding to night. Nowhere moved anything whatever, except the water of the Caño del Muerto, sliding almost soundlessly past the shore. Noises came from the woods, but few, far, and insignificant; the usual nocturnal sounds, portending no evil to men. He stepped within, fastened the flaps securely, and lay down.

" 'Night, " he said.

No answer came. Dussault had fallen asleep as if smitten by a club.

More gradually, Marden drifted into oblivion. The tent was hot and close. It was a wall-tent, with sod-cloth—not a happy selection for tropical use, since it excluded air. Moreover, the sand was still discharging heat. But, though the unventilated inclosure grew almost stifling, he would not arise to loosen the flap. Once down and thoroughly relaxed, he lacked energy to move again. Soon the heat and the confined air became powerfully soporific. He lost himself.

STEADILY the moon shone, casting cool radiance on all below; and in the open space where the tent stood, nothing moved. But when that moon had passed the zenith a vast cloud rolled over the sky, and all the Orinocan world became black, and remained so. Thereafter, some of the night noises were more loud and harsh and close. But each was silenced quickly, and none waked the men stretched within the tenuous shelter of cloth. Except for unconscious changes of posture, neither moved.

Toward morning, however, Marden's eyes sprang open and his head lifted. What had aroused him he could not tell, but he was wide awake in an instant, every nerve alert. No sound came, except the steady breathing of Dussault and the barely audible murmur of the *caño*. Yet something was not right. Something was near him, very near;

something dangerous, something wicked, from which an age-old instinct within him recoiled. In the dense blackness he could see nothing.

For minutes he lay tense, motionless, striving either to identify the unknown presence or to convince himself that it did not exist. At times he sensed movement, thought he could hear steps, faint as the tread of a ghost; but not once could he be sure. At length, very slowly, he slipped his gun from its sheath and drew a flat flashlight from his shirt. Pressing the switch, he swept the light around.

The thing was not in the tent. The flap was firmly tied. The sand was bare of all but the equipment and his fellow sleeper. Forgetful of his agreement with Dussault, he arose to his knees, impelled to step to the doorway, open it, and look around outside. But he remained where he was. The little monitor within him warned against leaving the tent, or even loosing the flap. Presently he lay down again, and extinguished the light.

For some time he remained awake and intent, recurrently feeling that dread presence close beside him, yet never hearing it. Dussault slept on. At last the strain eased; his nerves relaxed, as if the thing had gone. Outside the first gray light of dawn was lighting the east, but he did not know that. Comfortably lazy, he relapsed into slumber, still holding his gun.

A hand on his shoulder roused him again. Day had come. His partner was up on an elbow.

"Are you awake? I'd like to get up, but I'm afraid to." Dussault's tone was a bit satirical. "Say 'yes,' and put up your gun."

"The gun's not for you, Rafe," responded Marden, feeling a trifle foolish. "I thought I heard something in the night."

Dussault chuckled in a way that made him flush. Holstering the weapon, he arose quickly, unfastened the flap, and stepped out. Then he halted short.

Dussault, following, also stopped with a jerk. There at the doorway were tracks —many of them—of big paws. And in the sand around the tent-corners lay a beaten path laid down by those same feet.

They followed that path. It ran all around the cloth walls, so close that the creature must almost have rubbed against them. Here and there the tracks showed a pause, a waiting position, head toward the tent. Otherwise the trail was virtually a rut. At the entrance, the widely trampled sand recorded indecisive movements, and even a gouge or two beneath the flap, as if the creature had started to dig in, then warily desisted.

"Man, I'll say you heard something!" exclaimed Dussault. "That was a *tigre*—a jaguar—death on four legs! A big one, and hungry! And he walked here for hours, within six feet of us. He could have ripped his way in with one slash of his claws, and after he landed on us our revolvers would have been about as much protection as a couple of bean-blowers. But he was suspicious of the tent—never saw one before, probably—afraid it might be a trap. It was lucky that you tied that flap."

"And luckier," mused Marden, "that I didn't untie it."

VI

NOON again, clear and hot. The cloud-bank of the night had broken up at sunrise, to sail away as a fleet of sky-galleons and disappear beyond the horizon. Now the sun beat mercilessly on castle, *caño*, and all the chaotic wilderness round about.

The dry inlet where the tent had stood was empty once more. Tracks, cook-fire ashes, and the rust-ruined rifle were the only vestiges of the night camp. Now the canoe lay snugly berthed on the opposite side of the creek, loaded ready for departure. Upon the minds of the men who had left it there, however, weighed the conviction that the time for departure was neither yet nor soon.

Throughout the forenoon they had worked slowly along the base of the Castillo, examining the tall wall for a

practicable line of ascent, and inspecting the adjacent ground as they passed along. Now they had reached an impasse. The entire length of the nearer side had been surveyed without result, and at its termination yawned a gulf. The rear was a sheer precipice of stone, dropping a hundred feet, to the water of the semicircling *caño*.

Standing at the verge, the explorers idly noted that a short distance upstream the creek flowed through a rather wide swamp, now almost dried up, but holding a few stagnant pools.

"A good place to breed fever, that," Dussault perfunctorily remarked, "and moquitoes and other pleasant things. It will do us no harm to start taking quinine, just as a precaution. Malarial fever is like women—easier to get than to get rid of."

"Uh-huh," yawned Marden. "Well, let's go and eat. Then we'll tackle the other side."

They moved back among the tall trees which here fringed the black wall, stepping with the springless gait of stiff muscles and languor, the legacies of yesterday's overexertion. Emerging soon from the woods, they descended the open ground slantwise toward the canoe.

Halfway down, Marden paused, studying a low, irregular mound on the hillside, whence grew scraggly bush. It seemed out of place on the otherwise uniform descent. After a moment of contemplation he kicked it. His wry grimace brought a smile to Dussault's face.

"Solid rock," mourned the kicker, working his pained foot about. "Just an outcrop covered by turf. I won't do that again."

"This whole hill is a rock, Jule. That slide yonder proves it. Stone, with a skin of earth."

They resumed their way.

A couple of opened cans and a drink of water served as the meal. Then they clambered back to the castle and continued their hunt.

Nearly all the afternoon they poked along the forbidding walls of the front and the long farther side. Trees were few here, and the ground bumpy with ancient fragments, fallen from the top and skimmed over by soil. The sun beat fiercely on the somber stone, which reflected heat against the plodding men, and denied them the light wind playing on the eastern side.

As the hours wore on the great block seemed truly infernal, hot and malicious, burning them, exhausting them, and withholding the access they sought. Study and stop and discuss as they might, they could discern no way up the uncompromising steeps. Although the wall was seldom vertical, its pitch was so abrupt and its surface so smooth as to offer hold to no creatures save small prehensile-toed lizards, which moved up and down with taunting ease.

At last, baffled, the partners stood again at the brink of the gulf, looking once more at the creek and the swamp.

"Well, Rafe," remarked Marden, with an assumption of cheerfulness, "we're like the old New Bedford whaler. You know, he went whaling and was gone three years and never sighted a whale, and came home empty. And when folks asked him 'What luck?' he said, 'Wal, I didn't git no ile, but I had a —— fine sail!' We haven't found a thing, but we've had a —— fine walk. And I'll bet your belly has shrunk an inch or two."

Dussault, though gloomy-faced, achieved a short grin.

"My pants are getting loose, that's a fact," he conceded. "And it looks as if they'd be looser before we climb this devil's rock."

"Well, now, it looks to me as if the things we're after weren't on this rock at all," asserted Marden.

As Dussault scowled he added:

"I'm not saying it's all a fairy tale. I mean they must be somewhere else around here—providing, of course, that nobody's found them since they were left. If we can't climb this stone, how could those old Spaniards of yours do it?"

"Maybe we can." Dussault's obstinacy came to the rescue of his sinking

hope. "Maybe we can't see what we're hunting for because we're too close to it. Sometimes that's the case. If we go farther away, and put the glasses on these walls, we may find that the very thing we want has been right over our heads."

"That's worth trying," agreed his companion. "Climb some of these hills around here and study it from different directions. There's one over yonder, just beyond that swamp, that'll give us a good view along this side. We can go right to it in ths canoe. And there's another off there at the right, and— Well, they're all around us. We'll start in tomorrow. And you'll climb 'em with me, old Lazybones. Best reducing exercise in the world."

Dussault smiled again, rubbing a hand over his abdomen, which already felt firmer to the touch.

"But I still have my doubts," Marden reverted to his previous statement, "that those stones are up topside of this thing. For one thing, it's too conspicuous; in plain sight from the Orinoco; a wonderful landmark, but not the place to hide something on, because it might attract other men to it, as it actually has, according to Ramón's yarn. And—"

"In those days there was nobody to attract but the other *conquistadores*," interrupted Dussault. "And the stones weren't hidden until the blockaders were gone. And the fact that there's no obvious way up here would make it all the better for a safe-deposit. Any men who did come would go away discouraged. And even now most men are afraid to come here; too superstitious. And I don't blame them, after what's happened along this creek. It's a wonder that any men at all have had the nerve—"

He stopped short, staring as if struck by a sudden thought; then resumed, with equal abruptness:

"Say! I smell a rat. It seems unlikely to me that those fellows who did come in, came just from curiosity. I'll bet they knew, or thought they knew, something about this treasure! As you were saying the other day, some of these people may be descendants of the soldiers who camped out there on the river. If they are, the story may have come down—"

He halted again, glimpsing an unpleasant conclusion which Marden, more outspoken, put into words for him.

"And somebody may have beaten us to it."

"No!" disputed Dussault. "They still come—those who dare to. Nobody looks for a treasure already found."

"That's true."

Marden stroked his long jaw reflectively, eyeing the swamp without seeing it. Then he turned.

"Well, Rafe, we can talk ourselves black in the face and get nowhere. And less talk and more walk will get us somewhere. Back to the canoe and some grub. Let's go."

"Correct."

They plodded back as they had come; looking up often in re-survey, but detecting, hopeful. At length they rounded the front of the block, there to pause again. Dussault peered upward; Marden out toward the top of the nearer Teta. The recent conversation had revived memory of the odd little projection seen on that huge dome yesterday. A long, tight squint through the glare revealed no such excrescence today.

"Speaking of the glasses, Rafe," he drawled, "we might put them on that hard-boiled egg over there tomorrow. Yesterday I saw something there that's gone now, and it might have been a man watching for—well, for something."

Dussault, startled, jerked his head around.

"The ——!" he ejaculated, scowling at the great speckless stone. "Those turtle-eggers over where that cur barked— But still, nobody saw us come in, and nobody could see us now, unless we stood up against the sky. They might as well try to find an ant in a ten-acre lot full of rocks."

"Oh, I'm not worrying. But I'm a little curious. Well, come on."

They trudged on down the hillside to the canoe; got aboard, unmoored, and

paddled a few rods farther upstream to a place where the waterside trees afforded comfortable cover. There, on the castle side of the creek, they constructed camp anew.

As on the previous night, they left their hammocks unslung, throwing them on the ground as thin mattresses; for no practicable way of hanging both of them, at comfortable distances inside, offered itself, and, though the nets might have been looped to outside branches by keeping the flaps open, those entrances were to be firmly fastened again tonight.

"The fact that we've moved across the water doesn't necessarily stop Señor Tigre from calling again tonight," Dussault pointed out. "He can swim. And there's that other thing—whatever it is—that got Rodolfo and Moisé. We'd be fools to leave the door open."

"You don't think that 'other thing' was the *tigre*?"

"No, I don't. No *tigre* eats bones. And no *tigre* drags its kill very far. We'd have found evidence. But that's not saying he wouldn't kill one or both of us, if he saw his chance. There's no sense in tempting him — or any other nightwalker."

So, when supper was done and the sun was gone, the doorways were shut tight.

Sleep came more slowly than on the previous evening, although the tree-shaded ground was cooler and noises were few. Each lay puzzling over the problem of climbing the castle wall; then, abandoning futile speculation, let his mind stray to other matters, near or far. At length Marden spoke again.

"How long do you suppose it'll be before Ramón gets suspicious, Rafe?"

"Oh, several days, probably. He won't expect us to tire of our sweet *señoritas* immediately." The throaty chuckle sounded. "And then it's a long pull from Urbana to Atures, and he knows we'd be unable to get canoemen around here now because everybody's playing the turtle-egg game; and there are no other sailboats going above here at present, for the same reason. The big turtle grounds are all downstream from here, somebody said. So we'd have to do our own paddling to get on to Atures now, and it probably would take us a week or more. I'll bet he's cussing the girls who vamped us."

"Probably. He was keen to interest us in his bean-patch." Marden laughed. "But I wonder if he swallowed our romance as readily as your other soothing syrup."

"Oh, yes. These boobs will swallow anything if you feed it to them in the right away. That tea, now—they took that because it was a treat. People don't drink tea much down here; it's an imported luxury, and expensive. Those fellows probably never tasted any before. So when we generous *señores* stood treat they gobbled it *con mucho gusto*."

He chuckled again.

"Uh-huh. But you're sure you didn't leave any evidence? You still have the bottle?"

A slight pause. Then:

"No. But I know where it is."

"Where?"

"At the bottom of the river."

"Oh. How come?"

"I dropped it over the side—with the cork out."

"Oh. Gave them the whole dose, eh? You're a liberal cuss, I'll say."

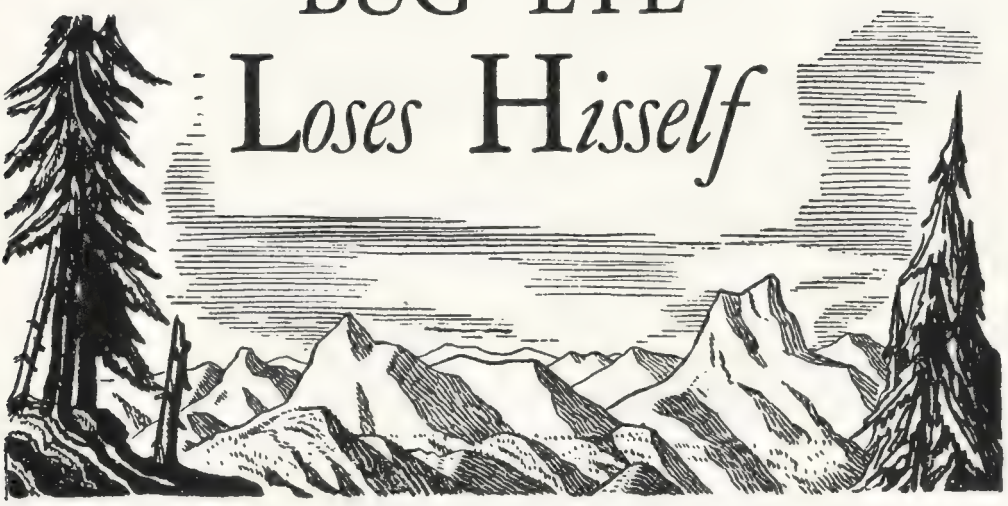
"You bet," grinned the drugger. "I had to be. There was barely enough to turn the trick."

"Uh-huh."

Marden yawned, changed position, smiled at the tent wall, and relaxed more comfortably. Before long he drifted into slumber. A thought, which had repeatedly risen to bother him in the past two days, was now laid at rest.

TO BE CONTINUED

BUG EYE Loses Hisself



Letters of a Wandering Partner

By ALAN LEMAY

Neer Peg Leg, Black Hills,
August 1878.

DEER Bug Eye,

Ever since I rode into Grand Eegil on wat was left of the Dedwood Coach, Bug Eye, life has ben pritty mizerbil fer fellers of avrige size, I meen seven foot or over like me. Werds seems to hav got all over the Black Hills that I robed the Dedwood Coach, it is a lie Bug Eye, but they will not lissen to anythin diferent. An now all the littel short fellers, 6 an ½ foot tall an under is on the shoot lookin fer me, all they noe about me is I am a life size feller, but that is enuf.

Now that I hav disgised myself as a Injin skwaw Bug Eye I am goin to begin givin out the troo facks in the case, naimly that I was ony a innisent pasinger on the Dedwood Coach wen it was robed an that all I reely had to do with it was I got my carpit bag stole ful of valybil things an got me 2 bukshot in the hine leg, I gess they are in ther yet.

I dont noe how the disgise as a Injin skwaw is goin to werk Bug Eye wen put to a reel test, but persnly I think I look much mor like a skwaw than a skwaw does, pritty neer any old skwaw granny woud wilinly sware I was her own dotter, an beleeve it too, an never noe the diffrunts.

Yesteday I walked into Peg Leg to try out my disgise an nobudy notised anythin unusal about me as far as I coud see, the ony thing was I coud not stay in town very long becaus my wiskers startid to grow out, I had to go back in the hills an shave agen or the beens woud hav ben spilled. You cannot look like the avrige skwaw Bug Eye with wiskers all over your fase. Well anyway Bug Eye we are rich men, the sachel of gold that the Dedwood Coach robbers left behine by mistake is still ware I hid it, an we are milynares an greate men Bug Eye, even tho it has not done us any good yet as far as anybudy coud see.

Wel Bug Eye wat I startid to tel you is that tonite is the great nite, an the medisin show that I am now a play acter in is goin to drive into Peg Leg an set up

in bizness. The feller from down eest in the plug hat an fancy vest an muddy pants that is runin the show has went all over the sckeem with me Bug Eye an sumtimes he almost has me thinkin that it is goin to work. He has a pardner Bug Eye, the pardner is anuther littel short feller, he is drunk wenever he can get it, an the 2 of them hav a old rikety buk bord an a cupple sachels ful of bottels of medisin an fansy flags an a nickil plated cornet an I dont noe wat all Bug Eye, but anyways the outfit wil look pritty good I gess wen they get it all rigged up.

It werks sumthin like this Bug Eye, the feller runin the show in the plug hat is named Perfesser, I never herd that name befor, he drives the buk bord into town with flags on it an a pore old mustang he has got about 100 yeers old warin a kind of shert all over him. It is a site Bug Eye to see this pore old broom tale of a horse pulin this old rikety buk bord with flags on it an warin a fancy shert with red brade.

The other feller his naim is Wally, wat a naim Bug Eye, Wally he walks on ahed into town, pertendin he dont noe nothin about the show at all he is jest a innisent travler. An yore pore pardner rides on this crazy buk bord Bug Eye dressed up like a skwaw an it is very hoomilyatin Bug Eye but I hope it is all fer the best.

Wel Bug Eye that nite in the town we bild a fire in the middel of the street an I beet on a drum an Perfesser stands on the buk bord an plays on his cornet, an he says a croud always gethers wen he plays his cornet to see wat is up. I gess a croud wil gether all rite Bug Eye I do not dout it in the leest. Persnly I think a lot of hoodlums wil start shootin to see whoo can graze the cornet the closest without nockin it out of his hand, and wen the cornet is used up I bet they wil start on the plug hat, I may be rong Bug Eye but I dout it. I hav not told the Perfesser that yet, I do not want to discerage him too much at the start.

Wel Bug Eye wen a croud has gethered he begins talkin about his wunderful medisin that he got frum the Kikapoo Injins, an it is a good speech all rite Bug Eye ony I do not like the Kikapoo Injin part I do not think peepul around heer like gokes about Injins an if his plug hat is still on by that time I feer fer wat will hapen to it now. But anyway Bug Eye, Perfesser has his mind set on it an nothin I can say wil make him see diferent so I gess we wil hav to go throo with it, I promised him I would do my best an not do no mor of my own thinkin than abslutly nesry Bug Eye.

After Perfesser has made his speech he calls on me, an I get up an make a speech in Choctaw, an Perfesser says if you do not beleeve me heer is the grate Princess Scrumdag Moonpan Wiskybarl, or sumthin like that Bug Eye, leeve her tell you all about it herself. An nobudy is sposed to understand me Bug Eye so of corse they wil hav to beleeve me. Or anyway that is how Perfesser figgers it out, persnly I do not think it wil werk out anythin like that.

Perfesser wanted me to get sum fethers an be a Injin cheef but I coud not do that Bug Eye these britches leggins hardly reech up morn to my gnees as it is Bug Eye, I can not take off my blankit skirt an be a cheef, it woud not be desint. Anuther thing he wanted me to do is danse a war danse in front of all that croud but I abslutly refoosed Bug Eye, these Peg Leg fellers start ther own war evry time it cums into their heds, ther is lible to be trubbel enuf to soot anybudy Bug Eye without me goin to werk an sujestin it with a war danse.

Wel Bug Eye the nex thing Perfesser passes the bottel around fer evry 1 to look at it an then he hollers aint ther anybudy heer whoo has tride this medisin befor an heer is ware Wally cums forard with the teers runin down his fase an climes on the buk bord an tels them how he was a rooned man an giv up fer ded but he herd of Perfessers wunderful medisin an took 2 bottels an has not had a sick day sinse. An then the idee is Bug Eye evry 1 wil by a bottel of medisin an we wil be rich men.

I am not intrested in makin Perfesser

a rich man Bug Eye, you an me is rich men alredy, but I promised him I woud do it Bug Eye becaus I had to hav sumthin to eet, an I am a man of my werds.

It plum givs me the hot an cold shivers Bug Eye wen I think wat is lible to hapen wen I rar up to my full hite on that buk bord an begin hollerin in Choctaw, an I offen say to myself how wil it all end. But it is pritty neer time to start fer town Bug Eye an we wil soon noe the werst.

I may never see you agen Bug Eye, I am sory I hav ben delaid so much in bringin you back sum grub, an I wil say that you hav ben a farely good pardner acordin to yer lites. An I hope if anythin goes rong tonite you wil seek out the plase ware most of my remanes is beried an put a simpul monnyment on the grave with sum modest unassoomin epytuff on it, sumthin like this—

Heer lys pore
Henry Clay Montgomery
Onqwestinably the Best all
Round Man that Ever cum to
the Black Hills

just sum simpul littel thing like that Bug Eye carve on a little peese stone not over 8 foot hi, an mebbe a handful of vilets. An I wont ask no mor of this ongrateful werld.

Goodby Bug Eye, I feer the werst.

Yr. Obeedint Servant,

—HANK

P S I wil hav Perfesser giv this to sumbudy that is ridin tord Elk Mountain, I honesly hope you hav not ben —— fool enuf to jest set down an qwitely starve to deth at our trapin camp jest becaus I hav ben delaid a cupple months in cumin back with the grub.

P SS I think I better tel you wat to do with my ½ of the $1000000 dolars Bug Eye. If anythin hapens to me I want you to noe rite ware the gold is, I am afrade to rite it down heer fer feer this letter wil fall into eevil hands, but I wil think of a way to get werd to you in a minnit.

Wel Bug Eye in the 1st plase I want you to giv ½ of my ½ to pa. He has treeted me teribil ruff sumtimes Bug Eye but he is a good old gote wen sober, an he is the ony man in the werld that can wip me 3 times hand runin with his bar fists, I can wip the entire town of Hen Crick Bug Eye but I can not wip pa. So he gets ½. An the other ½ goes to my 8 brothers Bug Eye, split up as follers:—

Horace gets ⅓ Bug Eye he is a man that can take it or leeve it alone he wil not waste it, an Obadiah gets ¼, an Ezekial gets ⅛ an Thomas ⅙ an Ananias gets ⅛, an the rest of it is sposed to be split up ekally between the other 3 Bug Eye. An if that is not a fare divvy Bug Eye I never see 1.

An the hole kit an caboodul is got to chip an put me up a monnyment in Single Tree Indianna Bug Eye, an they got to make it a good old wooper of a monnyment too an not no nonsense about it. An I gess that wil show Single Tree that they lost a reel man wen I left fer the Black Hills Bug Eye an never cum home an wasunt a no good like they all tride to make out.

Goodby Bug Eye do not let pa an my brothers get foxy, they wil probly try to get yer ½ but you jest dont let on that you hav any of it, you hold yours out sepparate an all wil be hapy. This is my last wil an testyment Bug Eye if anythin like I am expectin shoud hapen. Goodby Bug Eye.

P SSS Bug Eye hav them put on the monnyment that I dyed openin the west to civylizashun. I gess that wil hold them I got it out of a polytical speech 1nst. If a Injin medisin show isunt a civylizin infloonce on the Black Hills I dont noe wat is, they must be hopeless.

P SSSS Bug Eye I hav changed my mind, they better jest put on the monnyment that I dyed trine to save lives, selin medisin to peepul that think they dont need it sernly cums under that hed Bug Eye these is my last words.

P SSSSS Mebbe it woud be mor stylish Bug Eye if they woud jest put on the monnyment that I dyed in the intrests of eddicashun, an mebbe hav a scool house naimed after me. This medisin show has sernly ben a eddicashun to me, an I trust

it wil be so to others. Now these is abslutly my last werds.

Sined,

—HENRY CLAY MONTGOMERY.

Jest outside Peg Leg,
A few hours befor
the show starts.

DEER Bug Eye,

I hav changed my mind Bug Eye, you better giv ½ my forchin to Suzy Peters an jest leeve pa an my 8 brothers rangle over the other ½, they wil hav the time of ther lives Bug Eye an be the hapiest peepul in Single Tree Indianna tho they wil probly be too ongrateful to admit it.

No that wil not do eether Bug Eye they wil kil eech other an ther blud wil be on my hed, we wil have to figger it out sum other way.

O hel Bug Eye use yer own jugment I am tird of thinkin about it.

We hav stopped to eet jest outside of Peg Leg Bug Eye but I cannot eet nothin, a cupple pans of bred an part of a side of beef is all I hav ben abel to cram down. But Wally an Perfesser is setin ther etin as if nothin unusal was lible to happen, it is siknin to see the way they stuf therselves Bug Eye.

Yr. Obeedint Servant

—HANK

Hidin out Bg. Eye,
Erly nex mornin.

DEER Bug Eye,

I new it Bug Eye heer I am mor ded than alive trine to hide myself an my buk bord an my rikety old horse in sum bushes an hopin that the pursooin mob on horse back wil not find me an my horse an my buk bord on ther way back. They cum along about 1 hour ago Bug Eye woopin an hollerin like Snoochuck Injins evry 1 of them an his brother drunk as eesterners, but I hav a grate brane Bug Eye I trun my buk bord off the trale, an my horse fell down an I got him up agen an made it too the bushes jest in time an the persoot went passt Bg. Eye. The skeeters heer is as teribil as ever I see but I think I wil liv to make my escape Bug Eye if the Peg Leg fellers ony give up trine to merder me befor it cums day lite.

I hav clected me 3, 4 mor bukshot in the hine leg Bug Eye the saim 1 ware they let me hav it befor, and if they go on shootin me in that saim hine leg they wil hav me limpin, an mebbe crippled fer life.

Wel Bug Eye we drove into town like I sed we was goin to an we lit the fire all rite an nobudy payed any atenshun to us wile we was bildin the fire but a croud gethered around the horse an waggin, an fellers was saying Hay look heer, heer is a horse warin a shert, an others was sayin ware, ware, an fellers was so thick a round the horse you coudent see was he warin shert or pants or wat an the fellers ferthest away was bettin wat the horse was warin anyway, an wether or not did the horse belong to sum crazy feller or was sumbudy trine to make a munkey out of sumbudy.

Wel Bg. Eye we finly got throo the croud an got on the waggin agen an Perfesser looked at the croud an sed this is pritty neer enuf peepul to begin skinin but I think I wil play my cornet an get a few 100 mor fer luck. Wel Bug Eye I dident see any luck in getin a lot mor hoodlums around wen we was alredy complettly serounded, but I sed nothin.

Perfesser picked up his cornet an maid a few swoops with his arms an stuck the end in his mouth, an shore enuf Bug Eye jest like I thout sum feller in the back of the croud sed I bet I can hit that an Bang he shot that cornet rite out of Perfessers mouth Bug Eye, an I sed I new it.

Wel Bug Eye Perfesser let out a woop an fell off the buk bord yellin Ime shot Ime shot an they all laffed at him an picked him up an put him on the buk bord and handed him wat was left of the cornet an sed Go on play sum mor we are enjoyin it. But he had lerned his lesson Bug Eye he put that cornet away.

But he was a game feller Bug Eye he did not noe wen he was beet, an he got up an he begun his speech an he went on throo with it too. Ther was sum fellers hollerin things at him that was ment to be

funny an other fellers was talkin together in mumbels and laffin an I did not like it Bug Eye I wisht I was home, but he went rite on with his speech at the top of his lungs.

Finly he cum to the part were I was sposed to make my speech in Choctaw an fer a minnit I was too week to get up Bug Eye, I gess I had stage frite or sumthin but he wispered get up —— and we wil soon hav this croud skun. I thout ther was goin to be a skinnin all rite but it looked like to me it woud be the other way round. But anyway I got up an I coudent think of nothin to say in Choctaw excepin a few prayers I lerned as a child, I dont noe wen I hav sed my prayers Bg. Eye but heer I was an I coudent think of nothin else so I let loose with Now I lay me down to sleep in Choctaw.

With that Bug Eye about 6 fellers begun laffin and I yelled thats rite you had better say yer prayers Hay fellers he is sayin his prayers in Choctaw an pore Choctaw at that, an everbudy begun woopin an laffin an hollerin an sumbudy thrun a rok an nocked Perfesser off the buk bord agen an I got mad an sed Eether you wil lissen to my speech or I wil wip the entire town an everbudy begun yellin an hollerin fake, kil them, cum on boys lets hav sum fun ware shall we hang them.

An about 60ty fellers begun climin on the buk bord an I kiked them off an a bulet went throo my sleeve an anuther cum so close it maid my nose itch, I bleeve they was shootin in fun Bug Eye or I would of got hit at that range even tho the lite was pore, but I do not like gokin Bug Eye espechully gokin with guns an I desided to leeve ther.

So I maid a jump Bug Eye an landed astraddle the horse, an the horse kine of sqweeked an fell down, an I picked him up agen an got on him jest in time, he was alredy runin wen I set him on his feet Bug Eye, I never see a horse make a brake fer the tall grass faster, I dident think it was in him.

Wel the croud giv us plenty of room, they jest fell over eech other to leeve us go by an the buk bord stuk rite with us, bounsin along in grate leeps Bug Eye, I never see such a buk bord it is old an looks rikety an sumtimes the front weels wont go the saim way the hine weels go, but it seems to stick together anyway, it must be maid of irn or sumthin. I sware Bug Eye if the Dedwood Coach was bilt ½ as good as this old rikety buk bord it woud never hav broke down.

I hav got my apetite back now anyway an I am still alive an farely wel, so we both hav much to be thankful for Bug Eye. An so far as I noe the gold is rite ware I left it, tho I must say Bug Eye that the way my luck is runin I hav not the hart to look.

This time I am sernly on my way to Elk Mowntin Bug Eye I am ony ritin this becaus this is a slow horse an I hope to giv this to sumbudy that is makin better time to Elk Mowntin so you wil be inceraged if I am delaid a few days mor on the rode.

Keep a stiff uper lip Bug Eye heer I cum with the grub. At leest I hav not got the grub yet but I will pick up sum on the rode sum way. A man that can make $1000000 dolars in a ½ day can do anythin.

Yr. Obeedint Servant,
—HANK.

This side of Grand Eegil,
the follerin day.

DEER Bug Eye,

I feer I am not goin to make as good time as I thout I woud Bg. Eye, I dident expect to rite you no more leters but I am havin so much trubbel with this horse I thout I better rite 1 mor leter to tel you wy I am delaid, an this is positivly the last leter, keep a stiff uper lip Bug Eye.

Erly this mornin Bug Eye the mob passed by agen on ther way back to town an they was not hollerin an woopin this time they looked tired an mad an was qwarlin with eech other. My horse winnied wen they went passt an sumbudy sed mebbe that is the jint an his horse but 2 or 3 others sed I am tired of heerin about that jint we hav ben led a wile goose

chase all nite an enuf is enuf to hel with him I wil shoot the nex man that brings the subjeck up. An 5 or 6 ansered them back an they went on down the rode qwarlin with ther horses dragin ther feet.

Wel Bg. Eye wen they was gone I tride to get started down the rode but I gess the horse was tird out with the exitement, evry time I woud stand him on his feet he woud take about 2 steps an fall down agen. So I rumidged around in the stuff on the buk bord lookin fer horse medisin an I found the rest of that side of beef an I eet that but it did not seem to help the horse any.

Then I found 7 gugs of wisky an I giv the horse about ¼ of a gug an he took it like a man, an he stepped rite off down the coach rode like a bluded troter. He is a pritty old horse old enuf to be my grandfather Bug Eye but he can step along all rite wen he has a snoot full.

About 6 in the mornin he fell down agen an I giv him another ¼ gug an about 7 he fell down agen an I let him kil the rest of the galon an with that Bug Eye we made it all the way to Grand Eegil by 9 in the four noon without no mor drinkin by the horse, an he puled up in front of the mane sloon an fell down.

Ther wasnt any 1 stirrin in Grand Eegil Bug Eye 9 in the mornin is jest the middel of the nite to them, an I walked all over town without seein any 1 excep a few lyin in the street ded drunk an a few under the tables in the sloons sleepin it off.

So I loded a hogshed of wisky onto the buk bord an about 1 an ½ ton of vittels of all kinds out of the genl store a barl of pork an a barl of flour an a barl of mlasses an I dont noe wat all but I gess it is enuf to hold you fer a wile Bg. Eye. It is a good thing this is a tuff buk bord, I dont think this horse coud carry all this stuff in the form of a pack, but I think I can get the buk bord to Elk Mowntin all rite by usin a ax plenty.

Then I giv the horse a drink an helped him up an we got bettern 6 miles befor he fell down agen, and he looked like he needed a rest so I hav stoped to rite this leter but heer I cum agen now Bug Eye. I hav naimed this horse Wilbur after a cuzin of mine in Single Tree Indianna Bug Eye becaus no mater how much he has drunk he is always abel to get to his feet if ther is hope of 1 mor drink.

Yr. Obeedint Servant,

—HANK.

P S I hav found wat makes Wilbur fall down so much Bug Eye, it is his front gnees buckel up under him. But now I hav fixed that, I hav brased up his front legs with splints so his gnees cant buckel any mor. It makes him walk kind of funny but I think it wil save time an laber in the long run.

P SS Wilbur is still fallin down Bug Eye but I think I noe wat is the mater this time. His back kind of sags down an buckels an leeves his legs sprawl out in all derections an he falls down, I belleeve that has ben the hole trubbel all the time.

I hav fixed that now Bug Eye I hav brased up his back with a saplin an sum rope round his barl I am shore he can not make out to fall down this time.

P SSS Wilbur is still fallin down Bug Eye we wil never get to Elk Mowntin at this rate. I hav stoped to figger out how he does it, he is the clevrst horse at fallin down I ever see, I think he does it on perpose.

P SSSS I hav fixed Wilbur this time, he wil not fall down no mor it is imposibul. I hav riged up the shafs on the buk bord so they wil not let down an I hav tied Wilbur to them.

It is reel comickle Bug Eye to see Wilbur try to fall down now he puls up his legs under him an trys to fall but the shafs hold him up an we go costin along with Wilbur holdin up his feet an you never see a horse look so foolish. Then I hit him a lick an he puts down his feet an goes skiterin along agen, an we are making pritty good time Bug Eye we otter be at Elk Mowntin in a few days now.

Ther is ony 1 trubbel with this plan Bug Eye, I hav to push at the back of the buk bord wen we go up hill acct it is loded so hevvy, an Wilbur has found that out

an puls up his feet an rides up hill on the shafs. I dont noe wat I am goin to do about that Bug Eye but I will figger out a plan, a man that can make a $1000000 dolars in 1 hr can figger out anythin.

Dog Ridje,
Middel of the week, 1878.

DEER Bug Eye,

You hav done it now Bug Eye, as usal you hav figgered out the werst thing you coud posibly do an gone to werk an done it without sayin nothin about it an this time it serves you rite you hav ony made yerself a onhapy man an mebbe lost out on bein welthy fer the rest of yer life. Wil you never lern anythin Bug Eye.

Wel Bug Eye I trun off the coach rode at the Plug Hat Store an startid fer Elk Mowntin, an it took me 4 days to go about 75 miles wat with bildin brijes fer the buk bord an cutin trees out of the way an teechin Wilbur to swim proper an 1 thing an nuther, an sumtimes I suspishuned Wilbur was doin mor harm than good. But we woud hav ben at Elk Mowntin by the 1st of September anyway, you did not hav no call to get impashunt.

An rite heer on Dog Ridje I run into old Sol Bernside you noe the feller with the wite wiskers an wite hare, the 1 that dyed his hare last yeer an it turned green an made him look pecooler. Sol sed ware are you goin an I sed I am takin grub to my starvin pardner an he sed you are goin the rong way.

He sed Bug Eye left Elk Mowntin about 1 month ago, he got the letter you rote saying you bust out of the Hen Crick jale an was cumin back by way of Dedwood he sed and Bug Eye started fer Dedwood an is lookin fer you with a ax.

I sed wy with a ax, he woud be on foot an woud not need to make a rode like me an my buk bord wat is he trine to do. An Sol sed Bug Eye giv me the idee that he ment to hit you with it.

Now Bug Eye I never herd of sech a thing. Pitcher my serprize. Wat kine of a man are you anyway Bug Eye, wantin to hit yore pore pardner with a ax after all I hav done fer you. If you want to fite me with axes Bug Eye it is all rite with me, but persnly I think wen I see you I will meerly take your ax away an giv you the usal sound wipin with my bar hands, you must be out of yer hed Bug Eye an I would not want to hert you serusly with a ax.

Meenwhile Bug Eye I promised fathefully that I woud bring you sum grub, an I am a man of my werd, an I wil bring you that grub if I hav to foller you to the end of the erth. An you are goin to eet it too if I hav to cram it down you with a pole, an then you an me is qwits an I wil wip you within an inch of your life.

You make me mad Bug Eye. Brakin yer werd an leevin camp. Out lookin fer yer pardner with an ax. Meenin to hit him with it. Thinkin jest becaus you is 2 inches biggern me you can do like you pleeze. All rite fer you Bug Eye, you jest wate, I am on the warpath now an gettin mader every minnit.

Lookout you sope kettel, heer I cum.

Yr. Obeedint Servant,
—HANK.

P S I wil leeve this at the 1st sloon I cum to wen I get back to sum town, I noe you wil hunt up ervy sloon in creeashun sooner or later. An I want you shoud noe how I feel about this —— thing, I am givin you fare warnin I meen bizness.
—HANK.

How Billy Roche went as envoy to King Bilibibs

The Chains of Africa

By T. SAMSON MILLER

I SUPPOSE, mister, the libraries of these West African boats are stocked with books on West Africa so that we who come out of the Niger River to get away from it all can have a laugh at what we're missing. I've been reading "Cora Carter Among the Savages." Or rather, a chapter that's headed, "I Trail a Tent-Size Umbrella Across the Pagan Belt."

She couldn't have thought that Bill Roche ever put his face in a book, or she would have changed my name when she wrote up me and Tiny, my big Kru, and the umbrella I got at the Soboro trading station of the Sokoto Company, along with a top hat and other barter. Mister, I've tried to worry it out how top hats became the royal tiles of Negroland. But right now I'm trying to figure out what Miss Carter's trying to put over in this book.

If you ask me, I'd say she took notions. She took a notion about Tiny— "A columnar brute whose great strength was completely at the mercy of his emotions" —which means she didn't know which way Tiny was going to jump. Too, she starts off calling me a "blushing boob." You would think she would have got wise when she learned that the niggers called me Blood-in-the-Face. I've had sunstroke of the sympathetic nerve in the neck. The blood goes to my face over nothing at all, though it was a lot more than nothing when I opened my eyes in the hut in the village, beside the Soboro station, where Tiny and me were taking forty winks before hitting the trail, and mister, a woman was there—a white woman.

She stood there sort of half-smiling down at me. I was afraid to blink, lest I

blink the vision away; afraid almost to think, lest I reason away the reality of those wisps of gold hair under a sun-helmet and reason away the eyes that were bits of the blue calm of a cold North sea.

Mister, way off in the bush one gets these visions. One gets mighty homesick at times. But my brain was becoming wide awake to things, as that the vision blocked the entrance in a solid way, and I found myself thinking the lady was well-figured and handsome and around thirty years old, if she were real. Then Tiny moved at my side and let out a bellow, "A ma!" and how "ma" came to stand for white woman with the niggers is something to think about. But that bellow makes her real. I sit up and—but let me read you her book. Listen:

> I must say that the advantages were all with me in my first meeting with Bill Roche. I found him stretched with a huge Gold Coast Kru, who was as naked as his natal day, except for a rag about his loins. A pack of barter served him for pillow. A large Housa hat of straw and leather had rolled from Roche's head.
>
> His dress was a two-piece affair—a native gabardine worn over what the bush had left of a pair of trousers. For shoes he had sandals strapped to sockless feet. I frankly admit he inspired anything but confidence in me. But just then he opened his eyes, and something in the gray wells between sun-puckered lids belied the rags of scallywaggism. They recalled to me an old line of poetry, "He fixed his face in solitary space betwixt the wind and the open sky."
>
> He pulled himself up to a sitting posture, his teeth gleaming behind a coppery beard in a gaping smile. Next moment the blood crimsoned his face to the hue of his flaming beard. That decided me. If Cora Carter could not take care of herself with such a blushing boob she had no right to be adventuring. A man who blushed like that over nothing was not going to be any trouble.

Nothing? When I wasn't thinking there was a white woman within a month of trail and canoe, and wondering how long she had been there, and what she was thinking of me, stretched out there in a hut with a nigger, as if I had gone native. Then she spoke, and that was more confusing to me.

Her voice, low and full, filled the hut. Mister, I'd been hearing the harsh gutturals of the dialects so long that I'd forgotten that a voice could be music. She's saying that the agent general of the Sokoto Company gave her passage up river; that she is getting material for a book on Negroland, and would I let her accompany me across the Pagan Belt. Her knowing I was headed for the belt told me that the agent of the trading station had reported purchases I had made there, to the agent general. I had seen his stern-wheeler grounded in the pampas down river.

Yeh, they talked over my barter, with Cora Carter standing by, all ears. Beads, salt, leaf tobacco are for blacks who have not been reached by the company's barter and educated to mirrors, pomades and tin kerosene lamps. That would be the Pagan Belt.

Sure the A. G. would be wondering what I was up to. Not that he put Cora Carter to spy on me. He was but one more of the "poor, dear, lonesome, big-hearted men who were so eager to help me," as she says in her book, though an American at Ashantee gave me another slant on that; called her a gold digger with a specialized line in sirening and a specialized field in womanless frontierlands.

No, the A. G. didn't put her to spy on me. She happened to be listening in when my purchases were talked over, and—but let me read it from her book. Listen:

> This William Roche was a sort of fabulous figure, of whom little was known, except that once in a great while he turned up on a homebound boat with oodles of money, which he spent freely. Apparently he controlled a secret source of wealth. His adventures with his Kru giant—whom with not too subtle humor he had christened "Tiny"—were the fables of the Niger chop-rooms. He had no love for the Sokoto Company, whose sheet-iron stations were making it poor pickings for lone-handed adventurers.
>
> Be that as it may, I saw in this adventurer my chance to realize my great ambition to be the first white woman to cross the Pagan Belt.
>
> The ambition was now given a zest by the mystery of the umbrella, one of those tent-size, gaudily colored things one sees on the bathing beaches. These large umbrellas apparently

have a peculiar value or significance in Negroland, or else why were they included in the company's barter?

To inquiries I made of the A. G. I had received an enigmatical promise that if I were successful in persuading Roche to let me accompany him I would in all probability be enlightened. He—the A. G.—had hitherto frowned down my ambition to tackle the Pagan Belt. But he now allowed that the escort of Blood-in-the-Face, to give Roche's ridiculous name among the blacks, made it feasible. Roche, it seemed, bore a charmed life among the savages, over whom he exercised a strange control.

Mister, what does she mean by strange control and charmed life? There's no harm to the blacks if you savvy them and use a little tact and patience. As for me spending oodles of money, why, I'll take a sea trip and get the malaria out of my bones, when I've had a bit of luck—that's all. Why shouldn't I spend it?

And she goes on to say that the umbrella "intrigued" her, and that there was something romantically thrilling in going off into the unknown with a self-appointed ambassador to a potentate. If you ask me, I'd say that umbrella had her JuJued, as the niggers say.

Anyway, there was a lady proposing to trust herself off into the bush with Bill Roche. It sort of knocked me off a heap. I heard myself mumbling that I was no Cook's tourist guide—not meaning to be uncivil, but that flummixed I couldn't think.

Anyway she smiles it off and says as nice as anything:

"Dear man, I'll be no trouble. I'll have my own carriers and supplies, and I'm used to roughing it."

I couldn't tell her she didn't look it. All I could say was that the belt is no place for a lady. She smiles that away, too. And there it was. I couldn't right out and tell her what she might see. All I could do was to work on the risk to a woman. But she had looked to that end. The A. G. would let her have an armed escort.

I've no use for gun-toting bullies and never did have. Me and Tiny are "open palms," meaning unarmed and friendly. I explained that to Miss Carter, and that I had too much regard for the feelings of the blacks to carry firearms. Anyway, I'm strong for the tradition of open palms. I told Miss Carter flatly, no guns.

I thought that would settle it, for, leaving the savages out of it, did I look the sort a lady would trust herself off into the bush with? But again she smiled, or started to smile, when her eyes shifted to Tiny with scary question-marks in them. I turned to see what the Kru might be up to.

He was kneeling forward, looking intently at her face, and resting closed fists on buckled knees. Maybe she caught it that "closed fists" was the opposite to open palms. I told him to look away; told him it was JuJu to stare at a "ma." I might have said rude, if he had known what that meant.

She says in her book she was as nervous of the "huge brute" as of a suspicious, jealous mastiff guarding its master. Bless Tiny's black skin for his suspicions, or I wouldn't be here, nor would Miss Carter have lived to write this book. But at the time I had no thought other than that Tiny was taking notions about the ma. Tiny's liable to notions. I don't let 'em bother me.

Well, there it was. She smiled away objections as fast as I made them. So I said, "All right." I was making the trail at cool of sun, and if she wanted to risk it she was welcome, but it had to be open palms. She said she would be right back with her carriers.

Not till she was gone and the spell was lifted did I think to take stock of what I was letting myself in for. Tiny and me slip along, attracting no notice, and living off the country. Having a ma and a string of carriers made a lot of difference. So if she had taken thought and decided that open palms was too risky I'd have been relieved—and disappointed, maybe.

Yeh, I was sort of hoping. It gets mighty lonesome on the trails at times.

Too, you like for women and children to trust you, mister. So when she turns up it gives me quite a boost with myself. All the same, I hadn't expected a regular

column—a two-pole litter, which meant four bearers, and folding table and camp stool, medicine chest, bed roll, camera, tent, case of whisky, spirit stove. A regular column. Palaver all the way:

"Go back, white man. You are too many mouths. Go back. You will eat us up." Meaning eat up all the grain.

But Miss Carter lays fingers on my wrist and says—

"Dear man, a woman has to have things."

My sympathetic promptly registers

blushes over my blundering thoughtlessness, and I swing off to line up the march, myself in the lead, then Tiny, next Miss Carter in the litter, then the headloads.

If I had to turn in a report of that first march to midnight camp I couldn't say more than that we pulled one leg after the other and kept doing it over and over. But Miss Carter gets two pages out of it. Listen:

I confess to a thrill when the trading station was lost to view. What might not happen in the fortunes of Cora Carter before she again saw the station—the last outpost of the Company. Thrilling, yet solemn were my thoughts when the red ball of the sun sank over the edge of the plain and the sudden night of the tropics descended. I got what men on the Niger call the *feel* of Africa.

The scuffle of bare feet and a monotonous clicking of ivory anklets made tiny sounds in an encompassing vast silence. Occasionally there came from the plain the cackling snarls of laughing hyenas, and in between long whiles Roche would break out into a sort of caressing marching refrain.

"Tiffia, tiffia! Agamma, agamma! Achika, achika!" Which means as foolish as it sounds, "Go on, go on! Altogether, altogether! Close up, close up!"

These spasmodic encouragements to the blacks and an odor of rankest tobacco were the only evidences of my escorting adventurer, for my view was blocked by the huge Kru and the headload that carried all the adventurer's wealth and his stake to fortune, so wrapped in barter cottons that the umbrella was out of sight. Was that significant?

Of course, I kept the umbrella out of sight. I wasn't taking chances on a king seeing it and working all the tricks to get it away from me. Honest, mister, that umbrella had Miss Carter JuJued. Listen:

There was the fascination of a mystery about the umbrella; something suggestive of the Arabian Nights and magic wealth. It made me keep in mind that the potentates of Negroland have bizarre and naive fancies, and often a trading or mining concession of great value is exchanged for mere trifles.

But why so much secrecy? And why did Roche hold aloof from me? Was he woman-shy, or woman-contemptuous, or merely cloddish?

His indifference was no more to be borne with than the sickening jerks and roll of my litter, due to one of the bearers being but shoulder high to the others and so short in his stride that his corner of the litter dipped to each step he took. I experienced all the unhappy sensations of being tossed in a bunk aboard a ship in a choppy sea. A spirit of rebellion welled in me. I got out of the litter and went forward with the idea of edging in between the black and Roche. But with a quick step the Kru closed the gap. No word said, no glance given, yet it was as deliberate as if the Kru had said:

"Go back, ma. This is not your place."

I am not a nervous woman. But I must own to being a bit scared of the creature. It took no

imagination to divine an unreasoning jealousy and ferocious loyalty in the Man Friday. I had a feeling as of unknown potentialities about the huge brute. I might have scoffed at patches of chalk he had daubed on his chest for charm against the man-hating disembodied spirits that lurk along the trails, as the blacks believe, but I could not easily dismiss thoughts of my position if it was my misfortune to arouse the creature's suspicions.

Roche slouched on, unaware of the incident. I could not step forward and take a position at his side, owing to the narrowness of the twisting trail—no wider than a rabbits' run. But the more baffling thing was a feeling that I was an intruder; that thus had these two marched, toe to heel, for unnumbered moons. I went back to my litter, feeling utterly out of it, and clinging to a hope of a get-together at camp.

The hope proved to be another delusion. Roche left me to my blacks, whilst he and the Kru shared a pot of mealies by a camp-fire twenty yards off, scooping the mealies from the pot with three fingers and deftly tossing the pap into their mouths. As barbarously simple as that. Supper over, Roche lit his pipe, and then the burr of his voice in the dialect mingled with the thick bass of the Kru. Were they talking over the adventure—the fortune quest? I wondered. I was utterly out of it.

There was something remote about the man sitting off there cross-legged, the firelight on his bearded face, across which trailed slow shadows of smoke puffs; an immense calm about him that got me wondering whether it was the calmness of strength or stupidity.

I took a dose of courage and called him over, to a cup of tea. He rose unhurriedly, pocketing his pipe as he came, quite polite. The Kru followed the massa. Roche sank down cross-legged before my stool, as easy as taking a chair. The Kru squatted at his back, looking like a huge toad. I felt his limpid eyes on me. I repeat, I am not a nervous woman. Yet the steady stare of those night-hidden eyes was decidedly a handicap to my talk with Roche. Talk? He simply could not or would not take my leads.

SHE wanted for me to tell about myself and my adventures, to put in her book; said she was sure I had splendid material. I told her I had the dope on the niggers and would be glad if somebody would write 'em up from their side. People have wrong notions about savages, I said, and asked her to write up the "open palms" tradition as a sample of their squareness. She gives me a strange look, and says impatiently that what she wants to know is the country—whether it is rich and so forth.

Right there Tiny bays a native proverb—

"A dog hath four legs, yet it can not walk in two paths."

Tiny takes notions. I take no stock in them. The proverb is a warning against double dealing. I didn't see any connection between it and the talk of open palms.

If you ask me, I'd say our talk at that first camp got us nowhere. But in her book she hands herself a bouquet on the Refining Influence of Women; says I became less uncouth in my speech and, later on, she makes a lot over my sacrificing my beard on the saw-tooth razor of the barber of the first village we struck, though she don't know I sacrificed a lot of prestige with the blacks over it. Listen what she says:

> Lo, my man is quite presentable. But the giddy thing is that he did it for me. I felt that we were getting to be real friendly.

Is she laughing at me? When I give friendship there's no hold-back. I don't mock it.

I don't understand women; don't want to understand them. You don't try to understand a feeling. I never had a chance to know women. Mister, in a few days we'll drop anchor at Madeira. The sweet slips-of-things and their mamas who have been wintering there will come aboard and they'll have every bachelor tagged before we're an hour at sea. Maybe I'll get to know one of the slips-of-things, and we're sailing along fine, when mama bears down on me, closed fists. She has nosed it out that I'm not in the government service or on any company's payroll, found out there's nothing respectable about me.

So Cora Carter got below my skin, what with her trusting herself off into the bush with me, and wanting my company. Also there happened a lot that threw us together. We struck populated country—villages every hour or so. A ma on the trail—a red-headed ma, for gold and red are one to the blacks—stirred up a lot of superstitious excitement. Red is tabu. The blacks crowded her, prying into the

"magic" of the hooks and buttons of her khaki shirt and riding breeches. If I shooed 'em off with grimaces and they ran shrieking, I gave them the evil eye—and then it would be big palaver.

Palaver! When I try to barter food for the carriers the chief says:

"Our granaries are empty. Go back. You bring a witch-woman to JuJu our country."

That's their way of seeing it, and no bullying with a gun or flying off the handle will help. A chief sends word he is too sick to leave his hut. That's a trick to hold us there till we are down to bed-rock in supplies and have to accept a hard bargain. The chief has to be coaxed or tricked out, for it isn't etiquette to pass through without making a formal call. When it's only me and Tiny we slip around trouble. But that couldn't be done with a column. And the drums tapped out word ahead of us.

Another thing, there's Arab blood and arrogance mixed in with nigger blood, in spots of the belt. You can't rush an emir like you would a bushman. And being responsible for a white woman put the brakes on taking chances. I had to play cautious, and that was as good as an invitation to an emir to play it big. Don't blame 'em. Dig down deep enough and you find 'tis the same the world over.

What I'm getting at is, all this threw Miss Carter and me a lot in close company. She writes—listen:

> This going on and on, among peoples who seem governed by no known principles of conduct, is nightmarish. The bewildering babel of languages, for almost adjacent villages have different tongues, and one village may be inhabited by naked pagans, the other by turbaned and burnoosed Mohammedans.
>
> I shall ever retain a shuddering memory of Roche, trying to make himself understood in the pantomimic sign-language, with all the attendant risks of misunderstanding. The long day camps throughout the torrid heat, the sundown march, short midnight rest, then on till dawn. The unceasing ghostly shuffle of black feet, the monotonous click, click, click of anklets, that maddening, "Tiffia, tiffia! Agamma, agamma! Achika, achika!" The senseless twists and detours of the trail, which takes a wasteful swing around where once was a village and pestilence, or where the trail beaters had stepped around a skeleton. The skeleton may have crumpled to dust ages ago, but the detour remains. It is wierdly unreal. The carriers march like automatons.
>
> If Roche breaks his stride to light his pipe the headloads bump like a freight train coming to a stop. If a strange bird flies across our path the column tangles up in a knot of muttering blacks. You would expect Roche to jump in and crack their heads together—knock the nonsense out of them. Nothing of the sort. He calls a session; talks it over; humors their absurd superstitions; and chides my impatience with a reminder that whites often turn back when a black cat crosses their path.
>
> On the other hand the recurring fights for the lighter headloads, at each resumption of the march, flare given short shrift, whilst to see Roche doctor a black for snake-bite—a man sitting on the patient's head, another on his feet, then a swift incision made and the wound washed with permanganate of potash—is to see a vet doing cold-blooded surgery.
>
> Yet it was not long before I was to learn that he could be gentle doctor and sympathetic nurse. But I had no foreshadowing of that to soften the primitive harshness of this brute world.
>
> Most disquieting of all was the Kru. His opaque eyes watched me all the time. Was it fancy, or was there a malignant gleam in those black irises? He had a horrible way of standing right at my back during palavers.

There's a bit about me now. Maybe my sympathetic nerve can stand for the reading of it.

> Billy becomes more and more an enigma. Yes, I now call him "Billy," and wonder if ever he will drop "Miss Carter" for "Cora." That remains to be seen. Naturally there's a lot of unavoidable intimacy. Still I don't get to really know him. He does not give me his confidence. I'm quite in the dark about the umbrella, in spite of numerous hints. I don't know whether he is guided by caution or whether he is a victim of the silences.
>
> I could wish, for one thing, he would tell me what the palavers are about. I suppose it is so usual with him that he does not see how frightening it is to a greenhorn to see the wild gestures and wonder which way the palaver is going.
>
> Frankly, I do not share his sublime confidence in the open palms tradition. I have my bad moments, when I see in him a half-crazed visionary—a sort of Emperor of the Sahara with one black follower and a single barter-pack as his sole fortune. But ever the thought of the umbrella is a bracer.

Bracer? How? And as for my gentle doctoring, sure I'd be gentle with a woman. And she took her baptismal dose

of fever bad. She thought it was curtains. Sympathetic? Yeh, the grin's on me.

But—whatever came after—we were hunky-dory in those hours of her come-and-go delirium in the Hut of the Strangers at El Nadir. That's my alibi for my fool dreams. Lordy, how I worried to work things out in a matrimonial line. I couldn't see Cora Carter in gingham in a cottage. It'd have to be a town flat.

Yeh, I was figuring. I've had chances to make money, if I'd cared. I've been home and seen them all chasing money and it made me lonesome. I couldn't get in step; got to yearning for the tom-toms, the crickets and bullfrogs, the feeling of space around you, the guess at what tomorrow may bring.

I've disregarded the warning of the blacks too long.

"Oh white man," they say, "if you stay too long you will never go away. Africa will put chains on you."

But sitting there by Miss Carter, she forgetting she was clinging to my hand, I got to thinking it would be a flat—maybe in London. Yeh, we were that hunky-dory.

What made her turn of a sudden against me? It was still hunky-dory when we took the trail again, though the country was a let-down to her expectations. Listen:

> A country less promising of fortune than the low plateau of the Pagan Belt is unimaginable. The villages are merely clusters of bee-hive huts, the dress of the natives restricted to gee-strings and paint, their morals hideously evidenced in flesh-pots that whisper of cannibalism. The plateau is gashed with *wadys*—ravines—with a sparse growth of cacti and scrub mimosa.
>
> Imagine then my feelings when Roche tells me we are close to our destination, which I learn is a town called Ngurruru. Imagine my trying to translate Ngurruru—it sounds like a dog's growl—into "Eldorado".
>
> We were "legging along", as Roche would say, the bottom of a wady. I now learned the name and quality of the potentate. Bilibibillio, Sariki of Ngurruru. A sariki is something between a petty king and a sultan, and the name Bilibibillio means "born when the raven flew over the village", or "born when the cloud burst", or something like that.
>
> We are going to deliver the umbrella! I try to be jocund. I manage to remember that an ignorant Boer traded the richest diamond field of South Africa to an Englishman for an old shirt, and that a diamond field looks to the uninitiated every whit as unpromising as the belt.
>
> I remark to Roche in an inviting way that this sariki is no doubt very rich.
>
> "Rich!" he roars. "Old Bilibibs rich! That's as you look at it. He's rich enough for his neighbors to envy him."
>
> He radiated sublime optimism. He dropped his slouch, lifted his chest, marching with the erectness of one whose long-sought goal is reached. His eyes had a soft glow in them when they met mine. I will be frank. William Roche, Esquire, head of the Ngurruru Concessionaires Company—the Cecil Rhodes of the Pagan Belt—was wholly acceptable.
>
> I could almost hear the thoughts behind his glowing eyes. It was not stretching things to imagine that a large part of his immense satisfaction over reaching the goal lay in the prize he would be able to offer with himself. Still, I could have wished he had said in what and how Bilibibillio's riches lay. He was so up in the air that hints passed over his head.
>
> All I got from him was an enigmatical saying that all riches come from the ground. Well, that is quite true. But it was not emphatic enough to quiet certain suspicions of a man up in the clouds—a dumb poet, so to speak.
>
> There was much that was alarming. The carriers—ever the thermometers to the danger temperature—were exhibiting an alarm that was approaching a state of mutiny. They had cause enough for alarm. Our progress was watched by sentinel pagans along the tops of the bluffs. They had a most remarkable way of rendering themselves inconspicuous. They stood or crouched among the fantastic cacti with distorted limbs, so still that but for the whites of their eyes and bits of white bone and shell charms one would not have known they were there at all.
>
> "Friendly? Sure!" he throated—oh, feeling ever so good. "Bilibins and I are blood-oath brothers. We're open palms, too."
>
> He launched into a detailed account of a shuddering friendship ceremony. Imagine a white and a black sitting down together, to puncture a vein in their right arms, sprinkle salt on the clot of blood that appears, then lick it down with gusto. Imagine it! Ugh! But to hear the astonishing man tell it is to feel that he ranks it with the sumptuous friendship meeting of Henry the Eighth and Francis of France on the Field of the Cloth of Gold.
>
> Such simplicity was far, far from reasuring. Truth to tell, the situation became more and more alarming. The wady shallowed off to a gentle rise to the plateau, and the pagans now showed themselves openly, even crowding around us. I still retain a shivery vision of a press of ugly black faces—faces as like as sheep,

but with no sheeplike docility. I can still smell the odor of their bodies, still see the gleaming leopards' teeth that stuck up through their upper lips like fangs—a tooth to a lip, with here and there an ultra-dandy wearing two.

Arrived on the plateau, a widespread town lay before us. Roche sent Tiny ahead with the *dash*—the presents. The largess consisted of two hands of salt, a string of glass beads, the top hat and the umbrella. The Kru opened the latter—a huge affair striped red, blue and yellow—raised it high, the pole against his shoulder, and swaggered off as cocky as the ambassador of an emperor to his royal brother.

We followed, I at my lord's heels. And that "my lord" is not joking. Roche said over his shoulder that I was his woman—or the sariki might take a fancy to add a ma to his plurality of wives. He could say things like that as if they were mere nothings. But to me it was horribly suggestive of a topsy-turviness that afforded loopholes for misunderstandings.

Tiny met us at the entrance to the main lane of huts, his huge hands swinging empty. Bilibibillio had accepted the *dash*. That, anyway, was comforting.

I fully expected the Kru to claim his jealously guarded position at Roche's heels, but to my astonishment he fell in at my back, as if he divined a new state of affairs. I have said before how nervous I was of the brute at my back. It seemed now that he had taken the position by design. I even fancied an understanding between him and his "massa".

These two seemed to catch each other's thoughts telepathically. I could feel him at my back, feel his opaque eyes on me. Thus we marched down the huts, flanked on each side by dense masses of pagans. We marched to a sort of civic center, where the sariki and his court waited.

Of a sudden my eyes popped and my hopes sank to zero. Two umbrellas flashed their brilliant colors above the sea of wooly heads behind the sariki. My immediate thought was that some one had got in ahead of us. I had a truly ghastly suspicion that the agent general of the Sokoto Company had speeded an emissary to Ngurruru. When the A. G. had supplied me with the means for my venture I had taken it as another example of the gallantry of these big men of the womanless frontiers to the weaker sex. Now it was feasible to think that he had foxily calculated on me, and the carriers' delaying Roche on the trail.

If my suspicion were correct it put me in a bad light. I had come to Roche from the A. G. I had been the guest of the A. G. But these thoughts were overshadowed by my sympathy for Billy. Had he let out an oath I would not have held it against him. But just how he took the blow I was not to know. I could not see his face.

What's she meaning? The Sokoto Company didn't dash Bilibibs that umbrella. He won it in an ancient war with the Yergums, umbrellas being sort of royal standards.

Miss Carter wasn't savvy. I take it she was too scared to see things right. I noticed that she was shaking as we reached the sariki. I told her it was all right; Tiny would be right behind her. Why was she scared of having the Kru behind her? She didn't savvy. Take now the assegais. Couldn't she see that the blacks had stuck the spear-heads in the ground? Couldn't she read a friendship sign as plain as that? And listen what she writes of Bilibibs:

> An enormously fat, gray-polled barrel of black flesh on legs that bowed outward under his weight. His speech was a succession of abdominal grunts between thick lips pierced with two leopards' teeth, stuck upward like tusks. As he spoke, the teeth bobbed against the black tunnels of his flat nostrils. He held his head stiff-necked in a determined attempt to keep a top hat several sizes too small from falling off.

Is she trying to be funny with Bilibibs? Why don't she write what I told her about his big heart and what he did for me?

That telling came later, when we were making back over the trail after what her book here calls the most blood-curdling experience of her intrepid career. Listen:

> I couldn't for the life of me tell which way the palaver between Roche and the sariki was going, badly as I wanted to. Palavers had so often been on a hair-trigger balance. And you never can tell about savages. They may be as quiet as lambs one moment and the next instant be dehumanized furies. I was horribly nervous of the unintelligible grunts and wild gestures of the sariki.
>
> Of a sudden things happened. The pagans snatched up their spears and came at us in onrushing black waves, their open, red mouths venting terrifying yells, their spears flashing in the vivid sunlight. I said to myself, "This is the end." I shuddered a look at Roche. He was smiling! Smiling in the face of Death! Madman or super-man? The vicious spear-heads were right at our breasts. I shut my eyes—waited. Nothing happened.
>
> I lifted my eyelids with an effort of my will. The savages had flung up their spears and were executing a wild dance around us.

At first I thought they were cruelly playing cat-and-mouse. Then it came to me that the dance was an expression of homage. By what strange force, what mysterious power had Roche turned their murderous intent into adulation. I recalled the saying of the A. G. that Roche bore a charmed life among the blacks.

Charmed life. Fiddlesticks! The pagans didn't mean any harm. But Miss Carter isn't going to believe that, not after the break she made in her panic of a sham charge of assegais that preceded a war dance in honor of the sariki's guests. Her book don't say anything about her break. Thank Allah that Tiny was right behind her and grabbed a derringer she pulled from a pocket. Thank Allah he got the gun before the blacks saw it.

What would they have done? Why, pinked us with assegais before we had time to do mischief to their sariki. That is how they would see it. Yeh, Tiny was watching her all along. I don't count for his intuitions. I'm merely thankful for them. Oh, yes, sometimes they'll jump the wrong way. I'm mighty thankful they jumped right about Miss Carter, or we wouldn't have got out of Ngurruru alive.

She had that gun on her all along. It sickened a lot of sentiment I had allowed to grow up around her trusting herself off into the bush with me. But I was overlooking an alibi.

"Billy," she says, "how was I to know you set such store by mere tradition? It's grand and fine of you, but you can't expect a stranger to Negroland to rise to it right off." Then she made me see what a crude boob I am. "Why, Billy, any white woman going among savages would provide herself with the means to protect her honor, if she is captured alive."

My sympathetic never flooded my face. And, gee! I warmed to her pluck. I saw the gun in a new light. And that made it hunky-dory again.

Then why did she fire up against me? It came of nothing, far as I can see. We were legging back the way we had come. She asks what the palaver accomplished. I said there had been nothing to accomplish; that 'twas just a friendly powwow. She sucks in a breath and asks if I wasn't mistaken about Bilibibs' riches—"those riches in the ground," she says.

Not by a jugful. Ngurruru has four wells, which is two more than Bilibibs' nearest competitor possesses. Lordy, he has fought a dozen wars over his wells.

Miss Carter gasps:

"Wells? Do you mean he counts his wealth in wells?"

"Of course."

"B—but," she stammers, "why then did you go to all your trouble to take him the umbrella?"

Trouble? Why, that was a small thing—seeing what Bilibibs did for me. I had buckled up on the trail with fever. Tiny carried me on his back to the nearest town, which happened to be this Ngurruru. I was a stranger there. I was down and out; in rags, and sick. I was a white man. A white man nosing in where he wasn't asked. A spy, maybe. Did Bilibibs throw me out? Not by a jugful. His men took me to a sweat-house. They sweated out my fever in a bed of goat stablings and poured hot lime and red pepper down my throat. They made a racket with tom-toms and clappers that drove the evil spirit out of me.

Then they carried me to the guest hut, or the Hut of the Strangers. Women prepared food and chanted laments on the sad plight of the white man, so far from his country, his hut, his mother, wife, children, relatives, friends. Old Bilibibs comes every day to see how I am making it. We have long talks, about white man's country, and if Allah made the sun before He made the moon and the stars, and so forth, back to the beginning of things.

I told all that to Miss Carter. I wanted for her to set it down in her book. I'd be glad to have the world know it. But she jumped me hard, screaming—

"For mercy's sake, stop your ramblings and explain the umbrella."

She seemed mad with me, mad about the umbrella. I started to set her right about that, telling her that when I was convalescing at Ngurruru the young Magagai of Keddar came in, supposedly to

pay his respects to the white man, but actually to swagger two umbrellas over Bilibibs' one. The magagai—a sort of princeling—had married the Queen of the Munchi, thus adding the Munchi umbrella to the Keddar umbrella. He and his retinue of ruffians had come to crow it over old Bilibibs.

A lord of one umbrella must make obeisance to a lord of two umbrellas. And no half-way obeisance, either. It was up to Bilibibs to kneel to the magagai and put dirt on his head, or it would be "closed fists" between Ngurruru and Keddar. If that sounds foolish, all I've got to say is that my school history was full of big scraps of the kings of Europe over such trifles. I was pointing that out to Miss Carter, me wanting to get the blacks shown up right in her book, when she flies off the handle.

"But you are impossible!" She grabbed my gabardine as if to shake me. "You're stark crazy!" she hisses. "Tell me you are lying."

I ask her why I should make myself out a liar, and what in everything it was she wanted anyway. She burst out laughing. An ugly laugh it was. She laughed and laughed; began calling me all the names she could lay tongue to, like "blushing boob," "hulking brute," "bum," "harebrain," "noodle."

What got into her? I thought maybe I'd been too hard on her about the gun, so I set out to explain how her breach of open palms dragged the honor and prestige of whites in the dirt before the blacks, but she snapped at me to shut up before I got her to screaming.

Then she fell to talking to herself, something about the title being, "the nut with the gaudy umbrella," then says to herself, "No, that's too big a joke on me." She explodes another laugh.

I ask her to let me in on the joke. You'd have thought I had insulted her. I'll never forget what she spit at me. I wish I could, for then I might hang on to some of her feeling of those hours in the sick-hut when her gold hair lay across her pillow, her head cramped my arm, and she whispered, "Billy, you are a d-e-a-r," as if she meant it.

"You great gawk," she fired at me. "You blood-oath brother to a ton of gluttonous flesh. You humbug! You and your 'open palms' gibberish! If you want the truth about that gun you shall have it! Do you think a decent woman is going to trust herself off into the wilds with a rogue, without the means to protect herself!"

I'VE NEGLECTED the warning of the blacks too long—

"Oh white man, if you stay too long you will never go away."

I've stayed too long. I've lost out with my own people. I don't savvy them, and they don't savvy me. What did I do to Miss Carter to get her down on me like that?

If she wanted to make a real man-size story why didn't she set down what I told her about what Bilibibs did for the white stranger in his town. Don't friendship count for anything? Why shouldn't I pay the debt with an umbrella?

I've got a warm feeling for Bilibibs; a feeling that won't ever fade out. Maybe Cora Carter wouldn't agree, maybe she'd think I'm a bit off in my notions if she knew it is more satisfying to me to have paid my debt to Bilibibs and have made a real friend, than if I had trekked down a bit of fortune. What'd I have to show for fortune? What but the memory of a splurge in London? There are some things that money can't buy, and my feelings toward Bilibibs is one of them. And I'm downright thankful that Tiny suspicioned that derringer.

I've stayed too long. I'll know that when I'm walking the streets of London. I'll soon be shipping out again. And Tiny will be on the beach at Monrovia—waiting and watching for Blood-in-the-Face.

Trophies

BY WILLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON

THERE are no tiger-skins upon my floors nor trophies on my walls, but instead I have a gallery of memories that continues to grow, and a tale with each.

I left a valuable batch of rugs in Aden, one of which came from a sultan. Others were brought down the Persian Gulf, across the Indian Ocean and up the Gulf of Oman by silent, leather-skinned Arabs in open *dhows*. Silky, lustrous rugs they were, luxurious and beautiful. They would have neatly adorned a study, a drawing-room or a boudoir. But I left Aden traveling light to Zanzibar. How can I guess upon what divans those rugs are flung or what small brown feet find comfort in their softness?

B. Menahem Messa promised to forward two scimitars in velvet scabbards and a horseman's round shield embossed with hammered silver from Addis-Abeba in Abyssinia. And now Benin is dead, and the pundits from Bombay to Port Said have been wrangling over his vast estate for years.

To the officers' mess of the King's African Rifles at Ziwani went sacks of heads—buffalo, kudu, kongoni, rhino horns. And other trophies—shields and spears of the Massai, Mwaryemwezi, Watindige, Kavirondo. Two of these spears were thrown at me; one was my staff on a long arduous *safari;* and the shield was loaned by a *sultani* for a lion hunt with spears. We missed that lion, but I compensated the *sultani* by bartering for the shield with a sack of dates.

Out of Mongolia came one case I valued highly. It contained heads of argali—*Ovis ammon*—identified with the *Ovis poli* for which the younger Roosevelts combed the western Himalayas and the Pamirs. This giant mountain sheep is the big brother of the Rocky Mountain bighorn —*Ovis montana*. That case also contained rare antelope heads, crossbows, a coat of wild black goat-skins, a head-dress of red fox and quilted purple satin, a camel-bell whose deep lugubrious *clunk* is the voice of the Gobi desert, Mongolian branding-irons, *hu-hus*, bone pipes, chips of fossil bones such as Roy Andrews is unearthing in the Dune Country. A mess of junk. When that case arrived in the port of New York I was broke, and I let the Customs sell it without even going down to take a look.

I passed up an "F.R.G.S." because I needed the fee to buy the pony of a Buriat prince. Subsequently that pony won the fall Peking gymkhana. Of course I no longer owned him. We called him Hung Hutze, because he had the character of one of those conscienceless bandits, having killed three riders before I reached him on his softer side with carrots.

And the pets that were left behind! Ponies, dogs (thirteen of them at Kalgan, including a wolfhound of the original strain, sacred to the lamas of Urga, and a gift to my good friend Rustad, a man of influence with the Living God), antelopes, parrots, monkeys (the infection from the bite of one lasted until I reached London, six months later), a Muscat donkey (captured from the crew of the German raider, *Königsberg*, who fought as a land force in Tanganyka), a Bactrian camel, a young hyena (which my soldiers and I caught with bare hands on the Massai Steppe), a wild dog and a mongoose. The mongoose I valued most of all, but only for practical reasons. Twice I found adders under my field cot in the morning; and once we dug a trench through a nest of black mambas.

But, after all, trophies are perishable things. Scenes change. But memory is a constant companion. The best of the things I have done, the best of the friends I have met will be always with me.

Concluding

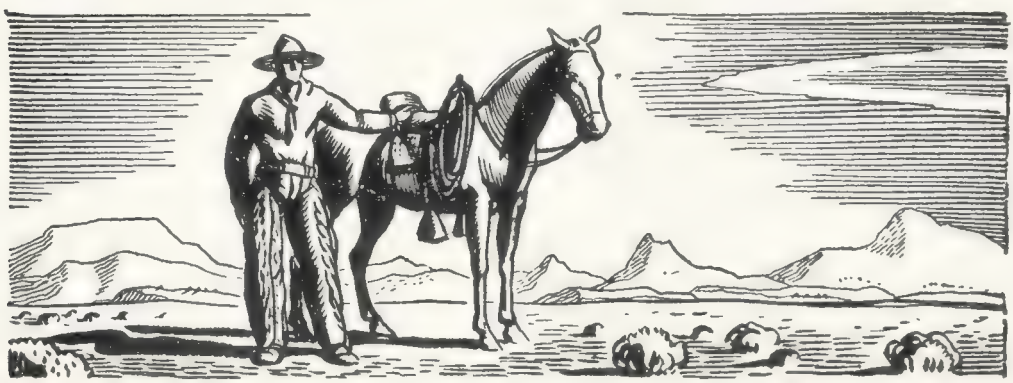
Thicker Than Water

WHEN shifty-eyed Billy DuMond took it upon himself to tell young "Angel" McCoy of a deep-buried episode of his father's past, he quite completely wrecked the household of old Rance McCoy, hard-bitted cattleman of the old school. For Angel, never close to his father, immediately told the news to Lila, who had just returned from study in the East: She was not Rance's daughter, DuMond said, but had merely been brought up to think so in order that she might never know that Rance had killed her real father. In tears, the girl left the old cattleman and went to live in the town of Red Arrow, where she soon got a position teaching school.

And then Angel began paying court to Lila. Somehow this infuriated old Rance, who came to Angel's saloon one night and tried to break him at cards, thereby forcing him to sell out and leave town; but luck—some said, shady playing on Angel's part—cleaned out the old man. But not to be denied, Rance came back the next night, having drawn out every cent he had in the bank, and played his hand till he had stripped Angel clean. And then Rance did a strange thing. He returned all his winnings to Angel and accepted an I.O.U. from him.

Which transaction, had it not been conducted in the privacy of a back room, would have set a number of tongues to speculating; but those tongues found other cause to wag at length when, that very night, the Overland Limited was held up near Red Arrow and more than one hundred and thirty thousand dollars —money and jewels—taken from mail-car safe.

"Hashknife" Hartley and "Sleepy" Stevens, passing through town, meant to stop over only for a night's lodging; but some one stole Hashknife's horse, Ghost, leaving in its place a crippled bay. That morning Rance McCoy's horse was found shot near the place of the holdup, and when Slim Caldwell, the sheriff, placed a deputy there to guard the carcass as evidence, the deputy was fired upon and the animal's brand skinned from its hide and its shoes removed. Then Billy DuMond was killed by the bullet of an unknown, and the bank let it be known that Rance McCoy had borrowed money.



W. C. TUTTLE'S *Novel of Hashknife and Sleepy*

Things looked bad for old Rance; so much so that the sheriff found it necessary to arrest him. Soon afterward, the jail was broken into, the guard slugged and Rance McCoy spirited away.

Meanwhile Hashknife had discovered that a disreputable cowboy named "Kid" Glover, one of "Butch" Reimer's Half-Box R outfit, had taken his horse and, lingering in town in hope that he might cross the cowboy's trail, he naturally became interested in the mysterious things that were taking place. And the sheriff, baffled as he was and, having heard much about Hashknife's past activities, casually dumped the whole mystery on Hashknife to solve. A black sombrero was his only clue.

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy testified at the inquest on the following day, but the questions were perfunctory. There was no evidence to connect Rance McCoy with the killing, so the coroner's jury decided that Billy DuMond had been killed by a gunshot charge fired by a party or parties unknown. But they did recommend that the sheriff apprehend Rance McCoy; the sheriff himself wanted Rance on the charge of robbing the Wells Fargo Express Company. Hashknife had asked Slim not to exhibit the black sombrero, and Slim respected Hashknife's wishes to the extent that no mention was made of the hat.

Reimer and his crew were there, but none of them made any mention of the hat, either. After the inquest Butch Reimer asked Slim who had the hat, and was informed that the hat was locked up in the office safe. Butch did not comment on it, nor did he ask just why Billy DuMond's hat should be locked up in a safe.

Billy DuMond's body was duly interred that day, and there were no mourners. Butch Reimer paid the preacher and the doctor, who acted in the capacity of undertaker, and Billy DuMond was consigned to what was known as the Red Arrow cemetery—the wind-swept slope of a hill, clustered with greasewood.

"I'm goin' to git the man who shot Billy," Butch Reimer was heard to declare, and every one knew he meant Rance McCoy.

"You better not announce yore approach," grinned Jim Langley, who came in for the inquest. "He's one hard old jigger."

Langley had Jess Fohl with him. Jess drank quite a lot of liquor before the funeral, and cried all the way back to town. Langley told Jess he'd cut his ears off if he took another drink; then he came down and talked with Slim and Hashknife about old Rance. Langley did not seem to think that Rance shot DuMond, but he would not even venture a guess as to who had killed him.

"Why don'tcha think it was Rance?" queried Hashknife.

"It's like this," explained Langley. "Rance got that hundred and thirty-two thousand dollars cached. Chuckwalla busted jail for him, and old Rance has high-tailed it out of this country, takin'

the stuff along. As soon as things blow over, old Chuckwalla will hit the grit. Now you jist watch and see if I ain't right, Slim."

"And you think Rance was so anxious to get out of the country that he wouldn't stop long enough to kill DuMond, eh?" asked Hashknife.

"I don't think he would."

"And you don't think old Rance will ever come back?"

Langley shut his lips tightly and shook his head.

"No," he said, "I'd almost bet he won't."

"Well, we better work on it from a different angle, Hashknife," said Slim seriously.

"Are you workin' on it, Hartley?" asked Langley.

"Well, I'm kinda helpin' Slim," laughed Hashknife.

LATER on that day Langley and Butch Reimer met in front of the Red Arrow and discussed the case. Reimer had imbibed a few drinks and was inclined to be big-voiced.

"What we need is a sheriff who can arrest and hold a man," he said. "Slim's all right in his way, but he don't weigh enough. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

Langley laughed with him.

"Slim's got a feller workin' with him who's jist a little skinnier than Slim," laughed Langley.

"Oh, that Hartley person. Don't look like much, does he, Jim? But lemme tell yuh somethin'," Butch grew very confidential. "Slim says this feller is a wonder as a detective. Accordin' to Slim, this Hartley's got a nose that can smell out crime like a bloodhound follerin' boot-tracks in the snow."

"Is he a detective?" asked Langley.

"And then some, accordin' to Slim."

"Well," said Langley seriously, "yuh never can tell much about a man, lookin' at him from the outside. But Slim is goin' to need more than a thin-faced puncher to clear up all this mess."

"That's true. Say, have yuh seen anythin' of Angel lately?"

"He's workin' for me," laughed Langley. "Quite a drop, eh? Well, he was kinda sour on the world, Butch, and jist for fun I offered him a job. He's busted, he says. Old Rance cleaned him out that night, I reckon. He's a good puncher. For some reason he's sore at Slim."

"On account of that girl," said Butch. "They're both stuck on her."

"Shucks!" exclaimed Langley. "She was the one who busted up Angel's games that night. She said he was crooked. He wouldn't want her, Butch."

"Mebbe not; I was jist guessin'. Where do yuh suppose old Rance is hidin' out?"

"——, he ain't hidin'; he's foggin'. Betcha ten to one he never comes back, Butch."

"No, I wouldn't bet on it, Jim."

"How much do yuh want to bet?"

They turned quickly to face Hashknife, who had come up behind them unnoticed.

"Why, I—I dunno," faltered Langley. "How much do yuh want to bet, Hartley?"

"Anywhere from a hundred to a thousand—at ten-to-one, Langley. It looks like easy money to me."

Hashknife had exactly fifty dollars in his pocket. If it hadn't been that Sleepy's luck had been good at the Red Arrow, both of them would have been broke by this time.

But Langley wouldn't bet, and Hashknife had been sure of it. He knew Langley's type very well.

"Anyway," declared Langley, "that's my personal opinion. I may be wrong, of course. But why would *you* bet on a thing like that, Hartley?"

"I'd bet that the moon was made of cheese, if somebody would give me odds like that. And I really think he'll come back, Langley."

"Well," dubiously, "you may be right. He'd be a fool to come back, I think, don't you?"

"Looks thataway to me," agreed Butch. "I wouldn't."

Langley had some purchases to make, so he excused himself and went down to Parker's store, leaving Butch and Hashknife together.

"Jim just told me that Angel is punchin' cows for him," said Butch.

Hashknife smiled.

"I wondered where he'd gone."

"The Old Man busted him, Hartley. By golly, the Old Man sure went out of this country well heeled. He can afford to lose his ranch. I'll be danged if I think he'll ever come back. I'd hate to even take Langley's ten-to-one bet on a thing like that."

"Well, I'll take it, Reimer. And if Kid Glover ever shows up at yore place, I wish you'd let me know. I want that gray horse and I won't go hard with the Kid. He merely traded with me, and I'll consider that he's over bein' color-blind."

Butch smiled grimly.

"I'll tell him, Hartley. But do yuh really think he was back in this country?"

"I'd know them hoof-marks in ——. And if he was headin' out of the country, he wouldn't come back here from Welcome, just to make tracks in the dust."

"No, that's a fact. But lemme tell yuh somethin', Hartley: If you meet Kid Glover, shoot quick. He's a badman, and if he knows you own that horse, he'll kill yuh when yuh meet."

"Oh, I'm not worryin' about that' Reimer; but thanks just the same."

"Yo're welcome."

"He's kinda goin' back on his own friends," said Hashknife to himself, as he went back to the office. "Warns me to shoot first, eh?"

Slim wanted to go down across the river and watch the old dugout, but Hashknife had no liking for that tangle of brush at night, so they decided to make it an early morning call instead. Slim had sent out telegrams describing old Rance McCoy, warning the officers of the neighboring counties to be on the lookout for him; but as yet no one had reported seeing him.

IT WAS about midnight that night. Hashknife and Sleepy were in their room talking over the events of the day. The town was very quiet, when suddenly they heard a horse running up the street, a splattering of hoof-beats, denoting that the rider had, in the parlance of the range, "spiked his horse's tail" across the street from them at the Red Arrow saloon.

Hashknife cautiously blew out the lamp before raising the window and shade. Excited voices came up from the street, and Hashknife could see a horse and several men in the light from the saloon window. One man ran down the street toward the sheriff's office, and another headed the opposite way.

"We better go down and listen to this, Sleepy," said Hashknife.

They drew on their boots and headed for the saloon. Slim was just arriving on the scene, pulling on his shirt.

Dell Blackwell, of the Half-Box R, was the rider.

"Now tell me jist what happened," said Slim, half out of breath.

"Somebody shot Eddie Corby. Here's the way it was: Me and Butch and Jim Kendall and Eddie was playin' poker in the bunkhouse. Butch was losin', and he got so mad he tore up the cards. He always does that. Well, we didn't have another deck in the bunkhouse.

"Butch said he had several decks in the ranch-house, but he'd be —— if he'd go after one. Eddie said he'd get it, and Butch told him they was in a cupboard in the front room. Eddie was gone jist a few minutes, when we hears a gun go off.

"We busted out to see what was goin' on. We was all kinda jumpy since DuMond got shot, yuh see. But there wasn't nothin' to be seen, because it was dark as ——. There's a light in the house, and we all went up there. The front door is wide open, and there in front of that cupboard lays Eddie, shot from behind.

"I think he's dead, m'self; but Butch says to bring a doctor. I don't think

he's got a chance in the world. And that's all we know about it, Slim."

"Why would anybody shoot Eddie Corby?" wondered Slim Caldwell.

Corby was an inoffensive sort of person, who was not physically strong enough to be a cowboy, so he worked as a horse-wrangler and helped around the ranch.

"It's got me beat," declared Blackwell. "Eddie never done anythin' to anybody. Why, he hardly ever went off the ranch. Personally, I think somebody mistook him for Butch. They're about the same size, and Butch is the only one who sleeps in the ranch-house. I wouldn't tell this to Butch, 'cause it'd scare —— out of him."

"Who'd shoot Butch?" asked Slim quickly.

"Who knows? Butch might have enemies, Slim."

"I suppose he might. I'd better saddle up. When the doctor shows up, tell him I'm goin' out. Mebbe I'll beat him there. Want to go along, Hashknife?"

Hashknife shook his head quickly.

"You don't need me, Slim."

"I'll take Chuck. I left him tryin' to get his legs out of his coat-sleeves. Made a mistake and grabbed his coat instead of his pants."

Hashknife and Sleepy went back to the hotel.

"What's gone wrong with this —— country?" asked Sleepy. "Ain't they got *no* respect for human life?"

"Not in their frame of mind. From now on, look out. When they start playin' this here tit-tat-toe stuff with bullets, yuh never know when yo're goin' to be 'it'. I don't like the rules they use."

"What do *you* know?" demanded Sleepy.

"Guessin' a little, Sleepy.

"Yea-a-ah? Who shot this Corby person?"

"That's a pretty blunt question, cowboy. We better hit the hay and catch up a little sleep."

"Say!" demanded Sleepy. "Why in —— won't yuh never let me in on anythin' yuh know?"

"Dunno anythin'. Do you believe in heredity?"

"I sure do, you descendant of a clam."

IT WAS after daylight the next morning when they brought in the body of Eddie Corby, but Hashknife was not there. He had ridden away from Red Arrow an hour before daylight alone, leaving Sleepy to look and listen to everything that happened in town.

Sleepy protested against this, but Hashknife usually had his way in matters of this kind. He rode straight to the Circle Spade, where he found Chuckwalla Ike just starting to cook breakfast. The Old Man looked Hashknife over quizzically, but invited him to eat with them.

"Ridin' early, ain'tcha?" he asked.

"It's nice to ride early," smiled Hashknife. "Ain't nobody liable to bushwhack yuh early in the mornin'."

"Are you expectin' to be bushwhacked, Hartley?"

"Somebody killed Ed Corby at the Half-Box R last night."

"Well, I'll be ——! Ed Corby! I don't make sense out of that. Corby was a harmless sort of a jigger. Wasn't very well. I'll be ——! Probably lay that on to Rance McCoy."

Hashknife sprawled on a kitchen chair and rolled a cigaret, while Chuckwalla, muttering to himself, went ahead with his breakfast preparations.

"I came to talk with yuh about Rance McCoy," said Hashknife. Chuckwalla turned quickly, as if on the defensive.

"What about?"

"I want the truth."

"The —— yuh do! Well, now—"

"Don't flare up," said Hashknife. "If you turned Rance McCoy loose, it's all right with me. I've got a pardner, Chuckwalla, and I'd bust any jail on earth to get him out. What you tell me won't go any further—but I want to know the truth."

Chuckwalla flung a frying-pan on the stove and came back to face Hashknife.

"I didn't bust that jail!" he snorted.

"Lot of you —— fools won't believe me, eh? Well, don't! I don't ask yuh to. I want to find Rance McCoy as bad as you do—mebbe worse. Now, what do yuh think of that?"

"I believed yuh the first time, Chuckwalla. Now, let me ask you a question. Why did Rance McCoy borrow money from the bank a few days ago?"

"Did he? He never told me. Why, he had money. Didn't he bust the bank at the Eagle? Shucks, I don't believe he borrowed money."

"Did you ever know Billy DuMond to have a lot of money?"

"——, no! Never got over forty a month since I knowed him."

"When I found his body," said Hashknife slowly, "I found a paper in his pocket. It was an I.O.U. for seventy-eight hundred dollars, signed by Angel McCoy."

"Ha-a-a-aw?" Chuckwalla gawped at Hashknife blankly.

"I've still got the paper, Chuckwalla."

"——'s delight!" Chuckwalla yanked viciously at his mustache. "How in —— could Angel borrow seventy-eight hundred from DuMond, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless DuMond robbed that train."

"Yeah, he might," reflected Hashknife. "It was the same amount they tell me Rance McCoy won from Angel."

"By ——, that's right! Mebbe DuMond loaned him that much. But DuMond is dead and he can't never collect. I'll bet Angel's glad. He's the kind who would be glad."

"You ain't got much use for Angel, eh?"

"—— pup! Rance ort to have wrung his neck when he was young. He shore caused Rance plenty grief."

"What did Rance think about Lila leavin' him?"

Chuckwalla shook his head slowly and turned back to the stove.

"That hurt him, Hartley. He didn't say much, but I know him pretty well."

"But who do yuh think busted the jail for him?"

"Probably busted it himself. Mebbe they forgot to lock him in. That —— sheriff's force! I'd like to see one of the old-time sheriffs agin'. They'd keep their man, y'betcha."

Chuckwalla stepped outside and hammered lustily on an old triangle with a piece of drill-steel, calling Monty Adams and Steve Winchell to breakfast.

The two sleepy-eyed cowboys exhibited no surprize at finding Hashknife at breakfast. Chuckwalla told them about Ed Corby's death, and they marveled exceedingly.

"What's new about Rance?" asked Steve. "We're gettin' kinda anxious about the Old Man, Hartley."

Hashknife could tell them nothing.

"Yuh don't need to worry about yore pay," said old Chuckwalla. "The Circle Spade is worth it."

"Who's worryin'?" flared Steve. "We'd sooner work for our board for Rance McCoy than to get a raise at any other ranch."

"Yuh ought to—he lets yuh do as yuh —— please."

"Can yuh imagine a disposition like that?" queried Monty. "Chuckwalla, you ought to have rattles, like a snake; you've got the disposition of one."

The old man chuckled over his pans. He delighted in rough repartee.

Hashknife left right after breakfast. Chuckwalla, came out to see him off and shook hands with him.

"I hope yuh can get some track of Rance," he said. "I tell yuh, I'm worried about the Old Man."

"It's time somebody got worried about him," said Hashknife.

He rode back almost to the river and then turned southwest, intending to take another look at the old dugout, and wondering whether he could find it again. He felt sure he could come in from the opposite direction and find it.

Down among the breaks he struck an old cattle-trail, which he felt would lead him fairly close to the dugout, but it split up at a water-hole in a brushy coulée. There were plenty of Half-Box R cattle

in that part of the range, many of them as wild as deer. Hashknife worked his way back to the top of a rocky ridge, where he dismounted and made a cigaret. The breeze was from the west, and before his cigaret was rolled his nose caught a peculiar scent.

He lifted his head quickly, sniffing at the breeze. It was the unmistakable scent of frying bacon. Somewhere in that tangle of hills, and not far away, somebody was cooking breakfast.

Hashknife tied his horse behind an outcropping of granite boulders and began working his way slowly ahead, stopping often to sniff at the breeze. He was obliged to travel a crooked course, winding around the upthrusts of granite, the tangle of greasewood and sage.

Now he could smell wood-smoke, mixed with the odor of coffee, but it was evident that the cook was using very dry wood which made little visible smoke. Suddenly Hashknife stopped short and leaned in close to a boulder. Just ahead of him in a little clearing was a man, squatting at a tiny fire, with his back to Hashknife. He was eating from a small frying-pan, and drank now and then from a tin can, which flashed back the rays of the sun.

The man was bareheaded. Around his throat was a dirty white hadkerchief. He wore no coat or vest over his faded blue shirt, and his broad bat-wing chaps seemed fairly new. The sun glinted on the heads of the cartridges in his belt, and a heavy gun sagged from his holster. His hair appeared very black at that distance that Hashknife was from him.

Just behind him a bright-colored blanket was spread out on the ground, and on it lay a rifle and several odds and ends. Finally the man shook the coffee grounds from the can and poured the grease from the pan. Placing the two utensils together, he stamped out the fire, hitched backward to the blanket, and began rolling a cigaret.

It seemed to Hashknife that the man would never turn around. He leaned back on one elbow and smoked slowly, apparently taking his ease. Magpies chattered at him from a tall greasewood across the coulée. They had evidently scented food.

Suddenly a horse nickered, fairly close at hand. Like a flash the man was on his feet, crouched, his head swinging from side to side, as he scanned the hills to the north and west. Then he whirled around and looked in Hashknife's direction, but Hashknife had thoughtfully flattened himself against the rock.

Then the man stooped quickly, scooped up the blanket, took his cooking utensils and faded into the brush, like a shadow. But Hashknife had seen his face, and it was no one he had ever seen before.

The man was dark, thin-faced, long-necked. His hair was very straight and coarse, curving down over his forehead in a decided mat. He was about five feet ten inches tall, but probably did not weigh more than a hundred and twenty-five.

After the stranger's sudden disappearance Hashknife relaxed and watched across the coulée. It was possibly five minutes later that he saw two riders going slowly through the brush, about a hundred yards north of him. They were Jim Langley and Angel McCoy. As far as Hashknife could judge from their actions, they were not looking for anybody.

They passed out of sight, heading toward the Circle Spade ranch. But Hashknife held his position, and in a few minutes he saw a rider cutting along the side of a hill below him—a bareheaded man, riding a tall gray horse. He was looking back, as if watching Langley and Angel. Finally he turned and rode deeper into the cañon.

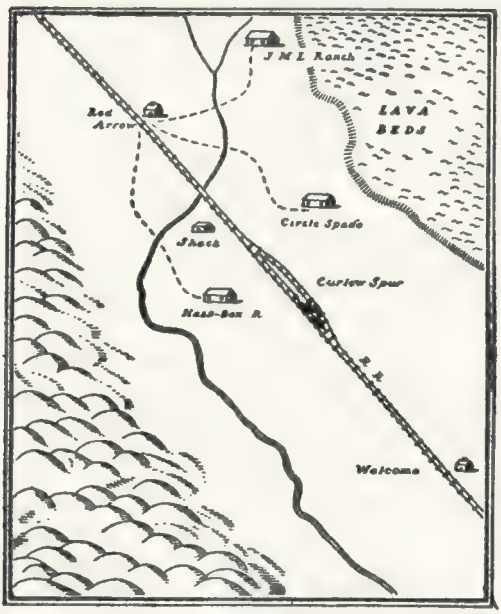
Hashknife grinned slowly and went back toward his horse.

"So that's Kid Glover, eh?" he mused. "He's a tough-lookin' *hombre*, and he's still ridin' Ghost. And he'll just about stick around here until I trade horses with him—and have one more horse than I've got now."

Hashknife rode across to the bridge

and headed back to Red Arrow. The news of Ed Corby's death had flashed over the range, and many men came in to look at him, wondering why anybody should shoot an inoffensive man like Corby.

BUTCH REIMER was in town, and Hashknife met him at the sheriff's office. There was no question about Butch's being nervous over the killing of Corby. He had lost his usual air of bravado. Sleepy told Hashknife that Butch had asked about him as soon as he



came to town, and Sleepy had led him to believe that Hashknife was still in town.

Sleepy had little else to report. Hashknife asked him whether he had seen Jim Langley and Angel McCoy, but Sleepy hadn't. As far as he knew they had not been in town that morning.

About an hour later Chuckwalla, Monty and Steve came to town. They wanted to hear more about the shooting at Reimer's ranch, and Chuckwalla wanted to find out whether Rance had any money in the bank to pay off the boys. It did not take long for Chuckwalla to find out that the bank did not give out any information, and they also told him that any money taken from the bank would have to be on a check signed by Rance McCoy himself.

Chuckwalla politely told Hale to go to ——, and left the bank, bristling with anger. He explained the situation to Monty and Steve, who told him not to worry about them. Hashknife had talked with Slim, and had finally convinced Slim that Chuckwalla had nothing to do with the escape of Rance McCoy.

Hashknife found Butch Reimer in the Red Arrow, and asked Butch for a description of Kid Glover, which was willingly given. It tallied very well with the man Hashknife had seen.

"You ain't seen him, have yuh?" asked Butch anxiously.

"I think so, Reimer. Anyway, I saw a man of that description ridin' my gray horse."

"Why in —— didn't yuh kill him?"

"Didn't think of it in time. I was wonderin' what he's doin' around here. After I find out, I'll probably have to kill him."

"Well, don't wait too —— long. I tell yuh, the man's a dirty snake."

"You didn't seem to think so the mornin' I first came to yore place, Reimer."

"Yeah, I did, but—well, he'd been with me over a year. Yuh see," confidentially; "I had a quarrel with him, and I told him I'd kill him if he didn't leave the country. I can't tell yuh any more about it. I suppose his horse went lame, so he traded with yuh."

"And then came back to get yuh, eh?"

Butch's eyes shifted nervously.

"I'll be —— if I know, Hartley. But I'm scared he mistook Eddie Corby for me last night. I ain't got a bit of evidence agin' him, but somebody made a mistake. Corby never had an enemy around here. ——, he never done anythin' to make an enemy."

"He must be pretty sore at yuh, Reimer."

"Well, I didn't know it was that bad. I'll sure keep my eyes open, and you better do the same. I told Slim just

what I told you. Glover would kill yuh if he thought yuh owned that gray horse. You take my advice—and shoot first."

"Well, I'm not goin' out to find him, if that's what yuh mean, Reimer."

Slim was interested in Hashknife's story of seeing Kid Glover, but Slim was not very much interested in Glover himself. Slim had too many things to think about to bother with a horse-thief. Merkle had been down to see Slim, demanding more action from the sheriff's office.

"I've either got to arrest somebody pretty soon or I'll take a punch at Merkle and resign my office," declared Slim. "I don't even know where to start in. It's all mixed up."

Hashknife agreed with Slim. There did not seem to be anything to work on.

"Don'cha know *anythin'?*" wailed Slim. "I admit that I ain't got no brains, Hashknife. The only thing I can think of doin' is to take a shot at everybody and then go on a long vacation. I'm gettin' jumpy, I tell yuh."

But Hashknife could offer no clues. He had a few theories of his own regarding things, but nothing for a sheriff to work on. Chuckwalla and his two men had left town about noon, and about two hours later Monty Adams rode back and came to the sheriff's office.

"Here's a funny deal," he told Slim. "While we was all in town this mornin' somebody got into the ranch-house and upset the whole —— place. I dunno what they was lookin' for, but they shore searched the old place. Even tore the blankets off the beds and smashed open an old trunk."

Slim shook his head wearily.

"Burglars, too, eh? By ——, the next thing we know, we'll be havin' our pockets picked. What in —— would anybody search the Circle Spade for?"

"That's what we'd like to know," replied Monty. "Chuckwalla thought yuh might like to know, Slim."

Hashknife grinned to himself, because he had seen Jim Langley and Angel McCoy going toward the Circle Spade. Were they expecting to find the hidden treasure in the ranch-house, he wondered? Did they think Rance McCoy had cached the loot from the Wells Fargo in his own house?

But as suddenly the grin departed. He seemed to hear Jim Langley saying—

"I'll bet yuh ten to one he never comes back."

Hashknife jerked out of his chair, swung out of the office and headed for the Red Arrow, where he knew he would find Sleepy.

"What happened to the clam?" wondered Scotty McKay aloud. Scotty was still bandaged, but able to be about.

"Didja see him shoot out of here, Slim?"

Slim nodded wearily. He was trying to figure out why anybody would try to rob the Circle Spade ranch-house.

Hashknife started for the Red Arrow, but changed his mind and went to the post office. He inquired for mail, knowing there would be none, but he wanted a chance to converse with the postmaster, an old, gray-bearded man.

"You know Kid Glover, don'tcha?" asked Hashknife.

"Not very well," smiled the postmaster. "He seldom came in here."

"Didn't get much mail, did he?"

"Not much. He used to get a letter once in a while when he worked for Jim Langley."

"How long ago was that?"

"Oh, a year or so. Do you know him?"

"Never met him."

Hashknife went across to the Arrow. There he found Sleepy watching a poker game. Sleepy followed him outside and they went to the stable and saddled their horses. Sleepy asked no questions until they were a mile from town, traveling north along the JML road. Then—

"Where are we goin', Hashknife?"

"Jim Langley's ranch, Sleepy."

"Trouble?"

"Not unless somebody else starts it."

These questions and answers were sufficient. Neither of them had ever

been at the JML, but they knew it was at the end of the road.

The JML was located on the bank of Lava Creek, near where it emptied into Red Arrow River. The outfit consisted of a two-story ranch-house, unpainted, one-story bunkhouse, a stable bigger than the house, and numerous sheds and corrals. It was a picturesque old place, situated on an elevation which gave them a free view of the long sweep of hills to the south. To the east, only a short distance away, was the broken expanse of old lava beds.

Hashknife and Sleepy rode up to the house and dismounted at the rickety front porch. There was no sign of life about the place, until they walked around to the rear door, where they found Roper Briggs and "One-Eye," Connell, the JML cook. They were squatting on their heels near the kitchen door, but at sight of Hashknife and Sleepy, Briggs got quickly to his feet. He knew who Hashknife and Sleepy were, but did not speak until Hashknife smiled and nodded to both of them.

"How do yuh do," said Briggs drawlingly, and it seemed to Hashknife as if Briggs' eyes darted toward the open kitchen door.

"Just ridin' around," said Hashknife easily. "Where's Langley?"

"Dunno."

Briggs turned his head and looked toward the hills. One-Eye continued to glare with his single optic, but did not open his mouth.

"Ain't home, eh?" queried Hashknife.

"He ain't," said Briggs flatly. "Whatcha want?"

"Nothin' much. We was ridin' up this way, so we thought we'd drop in and talk with Langley."

"All right, I'll tell him yuh called."

"That's fine of yuh. If yuh think he'll be back pretty soon, we'll wait for him, Briggs."

"Oh, ——, yuh can't tell when he'll be back. Might be pretty late."

"I see. You been here quite a while, ain't yuh?"

"Yuh mean on the JML? Oh, about three year."

"You was workin' here while Kid Glover was here?"

"Shore was."

"Where'd he come from?"

"Montana, I reckon. Anyway, he talked about that State quite a lot."

"Railroaded up there—" offered One-Eye—"passenger brakeman; I used t' railroad on the G. N. I could have had an engine years ago, if I'd stuck."

"He told yuh he used to be a passenger brakeman?" asked Hashknife.

"Shore. Me and him—say, whatcha want to know for?"

"I just wondered. I used to know a Glover over in the eastern part of the State and I wondered if this was the same feller."

"I dunno; mebbe was. I know he worked out of Missoula f'r a long time—so he said. I've been there."

"I heard he left the Half-Box R," said Briggs.

Hashknife nodded. Down in the nearest corral were three horses, and Hashknife could almost swear that two of them were the horses ridden that morning by Langley and Angel McCoy. Briggs glanced down that way and shot a quick glance at Hashknife, who was calmly taking his tobacco and papers from his pocket.

"Well, I suppose we might as well be goin', Sleepy," said Hashknife. "No use waitin' for Langley."

"No use, gents," agreed Briggs, visibly relieved. "He might be pretty late."

"McCoy with him?"

"Yeah."

"Well, much obliged anyway. See yuh later."

Briggs walked around the house with them, and he was still there when Hashknife and Sleepy swung out of sight around a brushy curve on the road.

"Well, that didn't amount to much," said Sleepy.

Hashknife laughed softly.

"Mebbe not; mebbe yes. All depends."

"What put the idea into yore head to

ask where that horse-thief Glover came from?"

"Merely curious."

"I didn't even know Glover ever worked for the JML."

"Lotsa things you don't know, cowboy."

"You never knew a Glover in eastern Montana."

"I guess not, Sleepy."

"Oh, all right."

They rode back to Red Arrow and stabled their horses, after which Hashknife walked to the depot and sent a telegram to the Wells Fargo, asking for certain information on Paulsen, the messenger, who had been in charge of the express car the night of the robbery.

Slim had some news for Hashknife. Dell Blackwell and "Boomer" Weed had quit the Half-Box R. The murder of Ed Corby caused them to draw what they had coming, and they were now in the Red Arrow. This left only Einar Sorensen, a tall, colorless Swede, at the ranch with Butch.

"And I'll betcha Butch would like to quit, too," said Chuck Ring. "He's gettin' jumpy."

"Did the boys say anythin' about somebody gunnin' for 'em?" asked Hashknife.

"They didn't say," said Chuck, laughing. "But they wasn't takin' any chances. Somebody's gone crazy, I think."

"Looks thataway."

LATER on in the day Hashknife told Slim about what he had seen in the hills that morning, describing the man as well as he could.

"That's Kid Glover all right," said Slim. "Why didn't yuh collect yore horse when yuh had a chance?"

"That would be the natural thing to do, Slim, but I'm the greatest person yuh ever seen to act unnatural. That black hat we found on the bridge that mornin' would just about fit Kid Glover."

"By ——!" exploded Slim. He opened his safe and took out the black sombrero.

"That's where I've seen it!" he exclaimed. "Right on the head of Kid Glover! What do yuh know about that? Hashknife, do yuh suppose he had anythin' to do with the killin' of DuMond?"

"Looks as though he did."

"Well, I'll be ——! Let's go and get him."

"Why would he kill DuMond?"

"That don't matter. We've got his hat and——"

"Yeah, we've got the hat. But yuh can't hang a man for losin' a hat, can yuh? That don't prove anythin'."

"We'll get him for horse-stealin' and make him admit the rest of his crimes. Why, my ——, it might have been him who killed Corby!"

"Why would he kill Corby?"

"Mistook him for Butch Reimer."

"Why kill Butch Reimer?"

Slim shrugged his shoulders wearily.

"Yo're the worst 'why' asker I ever knew."

"There's got to be reasons for everything, Slim. Men don't commit murder for the fun of it. Only a crazy man would kill without cause."

"Yeah, that's true. Why would he kill DuMond and Corby?"

"I can't answer that question—yet. And I'm afraid if we arrest Kid Glover for horse-stealin' we'll never know the answer. It's worth waitin' for, Slim."

"Do yuh think Glover ransacked the Circle Spade?"

"No."

"Then who did?"

"Remains to be seen, as the undertaker said when the hearse team ran away and smashed the casket. What would old Rance have in his house that anybody around here would want, Slim?"

"The express loot?" quickly.

"Mebbe yo're right."

"But where's old Rance?"

"Don't ask me. Yuh goin' to be around here this evenin'?"

"Right here. Why?"

"Oh, I might get an idea between now and dark, Slim. See yuh later. Oh, yeah; if there's a telegram comes to yuh—somethin' yuh don't know a —— thing

about, just hang on to it, will yuh? I signed yore name to one I sent today."

"Sure, I will."

Hashknife found Sleepy at the Red Arrow with Chuck Ring, Scotty McKay, Dell Blackwell and Boomer Weed. The two men from the Half-Box R had absorbed plenty of liquor, but were not parading their valor.

"I pulled out because I was scared," confessed Dell. "Mebbe somebody mistook old Ed Corby for somebody else, but we don't know who that somebody else was. Me and old Boomer wasn't in what you'd call a dyin' mood, so we jist asked for our time. Yuh can't blame us, can yuh?"

"Probably be a few hundred men killed around here before it's over," said Chuck. "Things like that kinda run in bunches. Epy-demic, they call it."

Hashknife managed to get Dell Blackwell away from the rest of the crowd, and while Sleepy was trying to lead them in song, Hashknife asked Dell about the quarrel between Butch Reimer and Kid Glover.

"Quarrel?" Dell was slightly owl-eyed.

"Yeah, the reason Glover left the ranch."

"Uh-huh."

Blackwell scratched his nose thoughtfully.

"Reimer swore he'd kill Glover, yuh know," explained Hashknife. "And Glover high-tailed it out of the country."

"He did, eh?" Blackwell grinned foolishly. "First time I ever heard of it, Hartley. What did they quarrel over?"

"Butch didn't say."

"And he swore he'd kill Glover, eh? Sa-a-a-ay! Lemme tell yuh somethin', cowboy—Glover ain't scared of no —— man. I ain't got no use for him m'self, but I'm here to tell yuh he's no —— runner. If Butch ever scared Kid Glover, he— A-a-aw——, he never did!"

"All I know is what Butch told me."

"Don't believe him, Hartley, he was kiddin' yuh."

"Did Glover ever have any trouble with DuMond?"

"Na-a-a-aw! The only man DuMond ever had any trouble with was Rance McCoy. Old Rance shore made Billy show yaller. Let's have a drink."

"You know Glover used to be a railroad man, don'cha?"

"Yeah, a brakeman. What'll yuh have?"

Hashknife had a drink with them, and left the place. He had definitely established Glover as a former brakeman, and Reimer as a liar. Ordinarily Hashknife would have paid no attention to the fact that Reimer had lied to him, but that he had lied about the reasons Glover had for leaving the Half-Box R made a lot of difference.

As he went back to the sheriff's office he saw Jim Langley and Angel McCoy riding in from the south end of the town. Langley waved at Hashknife, who returned the salute. They drew up at the Red Arrow hitchrack and went in to the saloon.

Hashknife grinned when he saw the two horses; they were not the same ones he had seen Langley and McCoy riding that morning, nor were they the ones he saw in the corral at the JML.

Slim was lying on a cot in the back of the office when Hashknife came in.

"Be all set to pull out as soon as it gets dark," said Hashknife softly. "We may find out somethin' tonight. I hope that —— telegram comes before we leave."

"I'd like to find out somethin'," agreed Slim wearily. "I had a visit from the county commissioners and the prosecutin' attorney today. They tell me I'm layin' down on the job. We shore said things to each other."

"That Wells Fargo man didn't stay long," observed Hashknife.

"Well, we had a prisoner. He said there wasn't anythin' for him to do, as long as we thought we had the guilty man. Hashknife, the more I think about it, the more I'm of the opinion somebody ransacked the Circle Spade, tryin' to find old Rance's cache.

"I don't blame 'em. My ——, that's a lot of money! Just think of a hundred

and thirty-two thousand in one grab! Who wouldn't try to get their hands on it. And that's why Kid Glover came back. He wanted to get a crack at it. But I'll bet old Rance is hidin' out, waitin' for a chance to grab the money and head out of the country.

"He'd know that a lot of folks would be lookin' for him, so he merely hides out until it kinda blows over. The Wells Fargo detectives are watchin' every exit to this valley. He's got to be here. There ain't a place he can get out, unless he flies out."

"What's yore opinion on all this killin', Slim?"

"Personal grudge. I think Rance McCoy killed DuMond. The more I think of it, the more certain I am. As far as Kid Glover's hat is concerned, I don't *sabe* it. I'm not even makin' a guess who shot Corby, except I think it was a mistake. They might have mistaken him for Butch. Dell Blackwell is no —— saint. Neither is Weed. It might have been either of them that Corby was mistaken for."

"That's all very fine," agreed Hashknife. "You think Kid Glover came back to try and find the money, eh? Then why is he hidin' out down there in the breaks?"

"He stole your horse, Hashknife."

"All right. Remember he was headin' away from this country so fast that he couldn't wait on a lame horse. Just at that time he grabbed the first horse he got his hands on. Would he care whose horse it was? He didn't know which way we were going. I'll bet he don't know yet whose horse he's ridin'. And yuh must remember he came back here, Slim. Kid Glover is down there in the breaks, hidin' out. He ain't hidin' out because he stole my horse."

"That's the worst of talkin' with you," sighed Slim. "I get an idea that I'm kinda proud about, and along you come and shoot it full of holes. Why in —— don'tcha tell me a few, so I can argue yuh out of 'em?"

"I never express mine," grinned Hashknife. "At least, not until they're holeproof. Suppose we go and eat? I'm shore hungry and it's almost dark."

Chuck and Sleepy were in front of the Red Arrow when Hashknife and Slim came out. Chuck went over to take care of the office; Sleepy followed the other two men up to the restaurant.

Chuck was standing in the doorway of the office when Butch Reimer and Sorensen rode in. Reimer reined his horse over to the sheriff's office, and dismounted. Going inside, with Reimer following, Chuck lighted the lamp.

"Thought I'd stay in town tonight," said Butch. "Lost two of my hired men today, and I'm kinda leery over what has already happened."

"I don't blame yuh," grinned Chuck. "Set down. Things like that kinda make yuh jumpy. I know I'd be jumpy."

While they were talking a man came in with a telegram and handed it to Chuck.

"Thought you might want it," he said laughing. "See if there's any answer."

Chuck opened the envelope and took out the telegram, which read:

PAULSEN WITH US EIGHTEEN MONTHS WAS WITH N. P. SEVERAL YEARS HAS GOOD RECORD WORKED OUT OF MISSOULA FOR YEAR.

WELLS FARGO EX. CO.

The telegram was addressed to the sheriff of Red Arrow. Chuck frowned over it. He hadn't the slightest idea what it was all about, so he told the telegraph operator that Slim would have to answer it himself.

When the operator left the office Chuck showed the telegram to Butch Reimer.

"Paulsen?" said Butch seriously. "Who's he?"

"That was the name of the messenger who got held up in that train robbery, Butch."

"Oh, yeah, I remember now. Where's Slim?"

"Eatin' supper with Hartley and Stevens."

"I reckon I'll eat, too."

Butch left the office, but he didn't go to

the restaurant; at least he hadn't been there up to the time that the three men left.

As soon as they got back to the office Chuck gave Slim the telegram, who passed it on to Hashknife.

"That must be the answer to the one you sent," he said.

"That's the one," smiled Hashknife.

"Did Butch Reimer come over to the restaurant?" asked Chuck.

"Is he back in town?" asked Hashknife quickly.

"He is. Said he was too jumpy to stay on the ranch tonight. I thought he went over to the restaurant."

"Did he happen to be here when this telegram came?"

"Sure. The agent told me to read it and see if there would be an answer; so I did. But I didn't know what in —— it was all about."

"Did Butch read it?"

"Yeah. I didn't know it was anythin'—"

"It's all right," said Hashknife. "Just take a little run around, Chuck, and see if Butch is still here."

Chuck was back in ten minutes with the information that Butch Reimer, if he was still in town, was not visible.

"His horse is gone. Sorensen, Blackwell and Weed are all over at the saloon, but there's no sign of Butch. And he ain't at the hotel."

Some one was coming along the sidewalk, and a moment later Jim Langley came in.

"What's new, Slim?" he asked. "Any news of old Rance?"

"Not a thing, Jim," replied Slim. "We're stuck."

"Pshaw! Me and Angel have been down in the country below the Half-Box R all day, so I thought I'd stop and see what was new."

He looked directly at Hashknife, as he spoke to Slim, but Hashknife said nothing about being out at the JML that day.

"Somebody ransacked the Circle Spade ranch-house while the folks was all in town this mornin'," offered Chuck.

"The —— they did! What for, do yuh suppose?"

"Some enterprisin' person tryin' to find where Rance cached the loot," grinned Slim.

"Prob'ly. But do yuh still think Rance pulled that job?"

"Who else?"

"Well, that's the way I look at it."

"What does Angel think about it, Jim?"

"He don't say much. Well, we've got to be driftin', and it's a long ways home when yo're tired. So long, gents."

After Langley left the office Hashknife wrote out a telegram, which he folded up and handed to Chuck Ring.

"Take that to the depot before yuh eat, Chuck. It's dark enough now, Slim. Saddle yore horse and meet us at the livery-stable."

Slim hadn't the slightest idea where they were going, but he was willing to follow anybody who might help him make good on the job. Ten minutes later they met on the side street, and Hashknife led the way toward the Half-Box R. It was very dark, with no hint of a moon.

"That's our salvation," said Hashknife. "If it was moonlight, I'd never ride this road tonight. Travel fast and keep still. There'll be plenty of time to talk later on—if we're able."

It seemed a long way to the Half-Box R, riding as they did blindly along the old dirt road, trusting to their mounts to keep the road. In single file they thundered across the bridge, where Billy DuMond had lost his life, and the frail structure trembled under the thudding hoofs.

About a quarter of a mile from the ranch, as nearly as Hashknife could judge, they slowed to a walk.

"Got to be careful now," warned Hashknife. "Don't talk."

"I wish I knowed what it's all about," whispered Slim.

"Yuh won't know," replied Sleepy. "After it's all over, he'll tell yuh—and you'll wonder why yuh didn't think of it before."

"Don't talk," warned Hashknife.

Hashknife remembered that just before reaching the ranch gate there was a culvert about four feet wide. As soon as they crossed it he drew up his horse.

"You stay here, Sleepy," he said. "Block the road with yore horse and don't let anybody get past yuh."

"Not anybody?" asked Sleepy.

"Not a —— body!"

"Suits me fine. And you better talk nice, when yuh come back, long fellow. Good luck."

Hashknife and Slim disappeared in the darkness, leading their horses. Hashknife led the way around the fence and came in beside the corrals. Here they tied their horses.

"Can yuh find the stable?" he whispered.

"Yeah," softly.

"Get down there, Slim. Mebbe you'll find somebody's horse planted down there. Stop anybody that comes, even if yuh have to bend a gun over their head."

"Who will it be, Hashknife?"

"You take a chance on that. If yuh hear a shot at the house you come runnin'."

Slim crawled through the corral fence and faded into the night. From where Hashknife stood he could see the dark bulk of the ranch-house; not a light showed. Slipping through the fence, he cautiously made his way to the rear of the house, traveling almost as silently as a shadow, in spite of his high-heel boots. There was not a sound to be heard except the sleepy calling of a night-bird and the incessant chirp of crickets.

Hashknife was not familiar with the interior of the ranch-house, but he remembered that there was a back porch, something unusual in ranch-houses. He made his way silently around to the porch, slid in under the railing and stood up against the back door, which was closed.

Hashknife felt sure that Butch Reimer had come back to the ranch, although there was no sign of him. It was so dark that objects were practically invisible a few feet distant. The house was as still as a tomb. Cautiously he tested the door and found it unlocked. This was not at all unusual, as few doors in the cattle country were ever locked. Sneak thieves were unknown.

Hashknife's next move was a foolish one. He slowly opened the door, thrust his head and shoulders just inside the house and listened intently.

And it was then that his brain registered a soundless explosion—a burst of flame which gave off no sound—and for a time, at least, he lost all interest in anything that might happen at the Half-Box R.

Then he felt himself jerked back to consciousness, he was aware of a heavy nausea and a throbbing pain in his head. He opened his eyes wearily and looked around. He was lying on the floor of a room, his head and shoulders propped against the wall, and on a box near him was an oil-lamp, turned low enough to make objects in the room indistinct.

His eyesight gradually cleared, and he saw a man squatting on his heels a few feet away, looking at him intently. It was Kid Glover. His thin, dark features were sharply etched in the yellow lamplight and his mop of black hair hung low over his forehead. In his right hand dangled a six-shooter, which Hashknife immediately recognized as his gun.

Hashknife sighed and closed his eyes.

"Don't play possum with me!" growled Glover. "What in —— do you want here, feller?"

It was evident to Hashknife that Glover did not know him; which was fortunate for Hashknife. He opened his eyes and looked at Glover wearily.

"What do I want?" he said slowly. "I just stopped here thinkin' I'd get a meal."

"Yeah?" Glover was not convinced. "Where you from?"

"Milk River, Montana."

"Yeah. Stranger, eh?"

"What happened to me?" asked Hashknife, feeling his head and finding a swelling which compared favorably in size with a door-knob.

"You horned in where yuh wasn't wanted, feller."

"Evidently. Sorry to cause yuh all this trouble."

"No trouble," Glover grinned widely, and evidently with great satisfaction. "I jist popped yuh over the head and packed yuh up here."

He lifted a lariat rope off the floor and got to his feet.

"I'm goin' to tie yuh up for a while," he said. "You horned in on somethin' that don't concern yuh at all, so I'll jist fix yuh up with this string. Kinda want yuh to stay put for a while."

"Well, I'd rather be gettin' along," said Hashknife. "If you'd tell me where the nearest town is, I'd—"

"You ain't goin' to no —— town. And if you make any crooked move, I'll even up the two sides of yore head."

"Oh, I ain't goin' to do nothin'," assured Hashknife meekly. "——, I'm neutral."

"You better be!"

Swiftly he roped Hashknife, who with difficulty repressed a chuckle. There were many things that Kid Glover did not know about hog-tying a man. The slight bracing of a leg, and arm, an elbow, meant nothing to the Kid; but it meant that Hashknife could relax and almost slide out of the ropes.

Then he whipped out a dirty handkerchief, forced Hashknife's jaws open and gagged him.

"I reckon you'll stay put," he said grimly. Then he blew out the light, crossed the floor and Hashknife heard him going softly down the stairs.

Relaxing his muscles, Hashknife began releasing the ropes. It was ridiculously easy. He untied the gag and stretched out on the floor. The exertion had caused his head to throb sickeningly. After a few minutes he began crawling to the head of the stairs. Just before he reached them his hands came in contact with an old kitchen chair of considerable weight.

Downstairs a door closed softly, and in a few moments Hashknife saw the glow from a lamp. Came a sharp exclamation. Silence—and then a harsh laugh.

"I thought you'd come back, you dirty sneak."

It was the voice of Kid Glover.

"Keep yore hands still, you —— fool! That's the idea. Mebbe yuh better unbuckle that belt. Just let it fall."

The thud of a belt and gun striking the floor.

"What in —— do you want?" Butch Reimer's voice was not very steady.

"That's a —— of a question, you crooked pup!"

"I never played crooked with you," said Butch hotly. "By ——, you tried to play crooked with me!"

Kid Glover laughed mockingly.

"Yeah, and you knew I would, Butch. But I'm back now, and I'll take it all."

"The —— yuh will!"

"Yeah, the —— I will. You see if I don't. I told yuh I'd kill yuh if yuh ever played crooked with me, and I'm goin' to keep my word."

"You killed Billy DuMond."

"Did I? Try to prove it."

"And you killed Ed Corby."

"Thasso? I never had any trouble with that —— fool."

"You thought he was me."

Glover laughed sneeringly.

"Well," he said, "yuh know I'll keep my word. Now, where is the stuff?"

"You'll never know," defiantly.

"Won't I? Butch, you better tell me. I came to get it. You know me. I'll cut yore —— ears off if yuh don't talk!"

"No, yuh won't, Kid. The only way you'll ever get anythin' out of it will be to throw in with me again. Laugh, if yuh want to. Why, you —— fool, everybody knows yuh came back. You traded horses with a man in Welcome and yo're still ridin' that horse. Know who owns that animal?"

"Aw, I don't give a —— who owns it!"

"Don'tcha? Well, he's the slickest range detective in the West. He's been watchin' yuh, Kid. I seen a telegram to the sheriff today. By ——, they've spotted Paulsen! Don't ask me how

they got wise. They'll get you, too. Me and you can pack up enough grub to carry us through and we can cut out through the lava country. I've got the stuff, but you'll never know where it is. Go ahead and kill me if yuh think it'll save yore neck."

"How could they spot Paulsen? Yo're lyin', —— yuh! There ain't no way they can spot him. Yo're tryin' to get off cheap, Butch. I don't trust yuh, I tell yuh. What about this detective? How do yuh know he's been watchin' me?"

"Told me he was. Oh, he knows yuh. Why, he saw yuh with his horse, you —— ignorant fool. He's got you on the run right now."

"I'm not on any run. Who is he? What does he look like?"

Hashknife listened to Butch's description of him, and it was fairly accurate. When Butch finished Kid Glover laughed chokingly.

"Butch, yuh may be right, at that. I've got to trust yuh a little, I suppose; but the first crooked move yuh make will be the last one yuh ever make. Lemme tell yuh somethin', Butch: Yore wonderful detective is upstairs, roped tight and gagged tighter'n ——. He tried to sneak in on me a while ago and I thought he was you, so I slammed him over the head with my gun and packed him upstairs. By ——, he made me think he was a stranger. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

"You mean to tell me you've got—"

"I've got a man of that description, Butch."

"My ——, that's luck! He was after me and you, Kid. What's our next move? If he's upstairs he can hear every word we say."

"What do we care," laughed Glover callously. "He ain't goin' nowhere. We'll shut his mouth pretty quick and then we'll head for the lava beds."

"You mean—we'll bump him off, Kid?"

"Why not. You —— fool, it's him or us."

"Mebbe he didn't come alone, Kid. He's workin' with Slim Caldwell, and Hartley's got a pardner. Better let me have my gun again. Two guns are better than one."

"I'll never be anythin' but a —— fool, I suppose," growled the Kid, and Hashknife guessed that Glover gave Butch his gun and belt.

"Better douse that light," said Butch. "We can light the lamp upstairs. Better wait until I fasten the doors. We don't want anybody sneakin' in on us right now."

Hashknife heard Butch working with the doors, and finally he came back to Glover.

Hashknife picked up the old chair, grasping it by the back, as he knelt close to the stairs. There was no railing around the stairway, and he saw the black bulk of the two men as their heads and shoulders came above the floor-level.

The next instant the heavy chair crashed down upon them, swung with every ounce of strength in Hashknife's arms and shoulders. Rungs splintered out of it, and Hashknife swayed sharply sidewise to keep from falling down on them, when his hands held nothing but the back of the chair.

He heard a sharp grunt, the bumping crash of a falling body, a wondering curse; and then he flung himself over the edge of the stairway, landing on a yielding bulk, the body of one of the men.

As he reached frantically down, searching for the man's holster, his hand came in contact with a revolver lying on a step. Swiftly he sprang down the remaining steps and into the front room of the ranch-house, just as the front door was jerked open.

Hashknife fired one shot, but he was sure it missed. The man had darted to the right, and Hashknife ran through the doorway after him, vaulting the railing, running half-way to the rear of the house, then paused to listen.

"Hashknife!" called Slim's voice softly from toward the stable.

"Up here," replied Hashknife, and in a moment Slim had joined him. Hashknife was thankful that Slim did not ask questions.

"I got yore gray horse and another one," he whispered. "The gray was behind the stable, so I moved it away. Then a man rode in and tied to the corral. I kept down, and as soon as he left the horse, I swiped it."

"Good boy! Where did that feller go, Slim?"

"I heard him runnin', and I think he went around the house."

"Around the house, eh? By golly, I bet he went back in. Look out for him, Slim."

They sneaked back to the front porch and found the door closed. Hashknife knew it was wide open when he came out, and there had been no breeze to close it.

Suddenly came the sound of a muffled shot inside the house.

"Get to the back door!" cried Hashknife.

Slim raced around the house, while Hashknife sprang to the front porch and flattened himself against the wall beside the door. He heard somebody in the house. Then it sounded as if somebody had struck a piece of furniture. Then he heard heavy footsteps near the door.

Hashknife gripped his gun tightly and swung up his hand as the door opened and a man surged out. But Hashknife did not strike him. Instead, he dived forward, wrapping his long, muscular arms around the man, and together they plunged off the few steps to the ground.

The man did not offer any resistance. In fact, it was as if Hashknife had tackled a dummy. Quickly he twisted the man's right arm behind his back, holding him down with his knees, and called to Slim who came on the run.

"Hold this whippoorwill," said Hashknife. "I think he's all raveled out, but yuh never can tell."

They exchanged places and Hashknife went into the house. Moving slowly back to the stairway, he halted at the sound of a groan and scratched a match.

Lying near the foot of the stairs was Butch Reimer, flat on his face, arms outspread. As quickly as possible Hashknife lighted the lamp and called to Slim, who came in, carrying the limp form of Kid Glover.

Hashknife turned Butch over. The bullet had struck him over the right eye, knocking away a generous chunk of his head, and from there it cut a nasty-looking furrow along the side of head to a point just above his ear. He was bleeding freely, and while the shock had knocked him out, there was nothing serious about it.

Kid Glover was a sight. As far as Hashknife could determine, the Kid had borne the brunt of the heavy chair. But he had evidently recovered sufficiently to shoot Butch and to stagger outside, trying to get away.

Hashknife stood up from his examination and grinned at Slim, who didn't know yet what it was all about.

"Where does Butch figure in this?" he asked. "Was he tryin' to protect Glover?"

They turned at a sound and saw Sleepy at the doorway, gun in hand.

"I heard some shootin'," he said simply, and came in to look at Butch and the Kid.

"I crowned the Kid with a chair," said Hashknife. "He got me first. Knocked me down and tied me up, but he don't know much about ropes. Then him and Butch decided to throw in together, put me out of my misery and clear out; but I got loose and smashed a chair on the Kid's head. I think Butch decided to get back in the house and recover his gun, and the Kid shot him in the dark, not knowin' who he was."

The Kid blinked his eyes and sat up, rubbing his head. He squinted painfully at Hashknife, shifted his eyes to Slim and Sleepy and then looked at Butch. The Kid was not shamming—he was very sick.

"You shot Butch," said Hashknife.

The Kid grimaced at Hashknife.

"I guess I didn't tie yuh very tight," he said.

"Not tight enough, Glover. Butch ain't hurt much, and as soon as he recovers I think he'll tell where the plunder is cached."

"What plunder?"

"The stuff you came back to get. You tried to play crooked with Reimer and DuMond, didn't yuh? But they shifted the cache and left a dummy package for you to skip away with. Oh, I've got you cinched, Glover. By this time the Wells Fargo have arrested Paulsen. You was a brakeman on the same train that Paulsen worked on in Montana.

"You framed it with Paulsen; you and Butch and DuMond. It was a cinch. Paulsen opened the door and let Reimer in. You broke the train in two at Curlew Spur, Reimer pulled the job lone-handed, while DuMond handled the horses. Oh, we've got yuh where the hair is short."

"Prove it," snarled the Kid. "You can't, —— yuh!"

Butch was beginning to make funny noises and trying to sit up. Hashknife nudged Sleepy and whispered:

"Take Glover into the kitchen, Sleepy. Watch the little snake. Slim will light a lamp for yuh."

They went away with Glover, while Hashknife squatted on his heels watching Butch fight his way back to consciousness. Butch had lost considerable blood, and the shock of the heavy bullet had dazed him badly. But he finally opened his eyes, and gradually a look of understanding overspread his face. His right hand, hanging limp at his side, twisted over against his empty holster.

Slim came back to the front room and Butch scowled at him.

"The Kid shot yuh, Butch," said Hashknife.

Butch started to speak, but changed his mind.

"Oh, we've got him," assured Hashknife. "He hasn't done anything but talk since we tied him up. He seemed to think we'd turn him loose if he spilled the whole plot, but he's such a liar that we don't believe him."

"What'd he say?" groaned Butch.

"He said it was you and DuMond that framed the scheme with Paulsen. I think he lied, myself, because he and this crooked messenger used to work together. He said he merely introduced Paulsen to you and that—"

"He's a dirty liar!" snarled Butch.

"We thought so," said Hashknife seriously. "And then he told us that you killed DuMond, in order to increase yore size of the pot."

Butch raised himself up on one elbow.

"Where is that dirty liar?" he demanded hoarsely. "By ——, he killed Billy himself. He came back here to kill me, too. He's a sneakin' little crook. He raided the cache and tried to get away with it all, I tell yuh! We knowed he'd do it, so we made up a dummy bundle. That's how he happened to cripple his horse, gettin' away fast—and that's why he traded horses with yuh."

"I felt that for a long time, Butch. And he killed Corby, didn't he?"

"Sure as ——, he did! He thought he could kill me and find the cache. None of the rest of my boys know anythin' about it. Bring in that dirty little sidewinder and I'll make him eat every word he said about me!"

"That was his hat we found on the bridge, Butch."

"I knew it. I was scared you'd work somethin' out of it."

"It sure helped," grinned Hashknife. "And another thing, Reimer. The night of that holdup, which one of yuh knocked old Rance McCoy down and robbed him?"

"DuMond," said Butch readily. "He hated the old man. Billy saw a chance to get him right. He wanted to kill McCoy, and thought he had, but I reckon it was a glancin' blow."

"And was it DuMond's idea to take McCoy's horse down there where yuh held up the train and shoot it?"

"Yeah, his and Glover's. DuMond mentioned it, and the Kid carried it out. He shot the horse before we went to Curlew Spur."

"Whose idea was it to skin out the brand?" asked Slim.

"I dunno. The Kid and Billy saw you and yore two men ride out there that

mornin', and then they trailed yuh over to the Circle Spade to see if yuh arrested Rance. After yuh left there and headed back for town, Billy said they got the idea of skinnin' out the brand and stealin' the saddle—tryin' to make it look worse for Rance."

"I thought that was the way of it."

"But how did you know it wasn't a bullet from the car that killed the horse?"

"That was a cinch. The cut is pretty deep there, Reimer, and any bullet fired from the car door at a horse outside the right-of-way fence would naturally range upward. The bullet that killed the horse was fired from slightly above the animal, ranging downward. And what holdup man would ever leave his horse in full view of the train?"

Butch rubbed his sore head and groaned.

"That's the —— of makin' it too strong," he said.

Hashknife walked to the kitchen door, opened it and said to Sleepy—

"Bring in yore company."

The Kid and Butch glared at each other.

"Butch says yo're a liar," grinned Hashknife.

"The —— I am! What about?"

"He says it was you that framed the deal with Paulsen."

The Kid started toward Butch, but Sleepy yanked him back.

"And you know —— well it's the truth!" rasped Butch.

"You —— fool!" screamed the Kid, trying to tear loose from Sleepy. "What have you told?"

"Told?" queried Butch blandly. "Why you told 'em—"

"Oh, you poor —— fool! I never told anythin'!"

Butch slumped back on the floor, glaring his hate at Hashknife, who grinned over his cigaret.

"Try and find the money!" snarled Butch. "By ——, you'll never find it!"

"No?" Hashknife looked pityingly at Butch. "Listen to me, pardner. Yo're close to fifty, ain't yuh? They'll give yuh close to twenty-five years for this job. Twenty-five years in the penitentiary is a long time. You'll be an awful old man when yuh come out. The money won't help yuh none. Mebbe we can find it ourselves. But if yuh give it all up and tell the prosecutor the truth about the whole deal, yuh might cut that sentence down to where you'll still be worth killin' when yuh get out."

Butch laughed harshly, shaking his head.

"What would I get off?" asked Glover.

"They'd only hang you once."

"That's a —— of a lot!"

"You ought to be hung once a week," growled Butch. Then he sobered suddenly and looked at Slim.

"I've got to have more than the word of that Hashknife bloodhound, Slim."

"I can't promise anythin'," said Slim. "You'll have to make yore deal with Merkle."

Slim went after the horses, and came back leading three. The tall gray horse muzzled Hashknife violently and acted as if he'd found a long-lost friend.

"—— that horse!" snorted Kid Glover. "If I'd left it alone, everythin' would 'a' been all right."

"If you hadn't been born a horse-thief, we'd have been all right, yuh mean," retorted Butch.

The two prisoners were roped to their horses and all started back to Red Arrow. There were three aching heads, a jubilant sheriff and one sour cowboy—the latter being Sleepy, who had shared in none of the action.

"You'll get into it," assured Hashknife.

"Yea-a-ah—next time! Next time you watch yore own back trail. I spend a week or so watchin' you build up to a big climax, and then don't even shoot off a Roman candle."

"I swear, I can't hardly realize it yet," declared Slim. "I heard yuh tell it all, Hashknife. Oh, I don't get any of the credit. —— it, I didn't know what was goin' on half the time."

"Yuh never will—around him," complained Sleepy.

"Well, he'll get that five thousand," said Slim.

"And give it to some orphan asylum, prob'ly."

"Five thousand!" snorted Glover. "Why in —— didn't yuh throw in with us, Hartley?"

"You made me mad when yuh stole my horse."

ANGEL McCOY did not ride back to the JML with Langley that evening. He had a few drinks at the Red Arrow, and decided to stay a while. Langley tried to argue him into going back to the ranch, but Angel was stubborn. Whisky usually affected him that way; so Langley rode on alone.

Sorensen, Blackwell and Weed were trying to spend the money they had drawn from Reimer, and with them Angel found congenial companionship. They were deliberately getting drunk. Angel could drink a lot of whisky and still not show it, but his talk usually gave him away. He became rabid, devilish; an anarchist without a bomb. Even the other cowboys wished that Angel would hang up his gun before he began drinking.

"Where's that —— sheriff?" he demanded, after the rest of the boys had grown goggle-eyed. "He's the whippoorwill I'm layin' for."

"What did Slim ever do to you?" asked the bartender.

"Hit me," snarled Angel. His pale face looked yellow in the lamplight, like old ivory, and his eyes glistened.

"Hidju?" queried Boomer Weed. "Whaffor?"

"None of yore —— business!"

"Hidju hard?"

"I told yuh to shut up, didn't I?"

"Didee, Dell? Didee tell me to shud'p?"

Dell Blackwell nodded solemnly.

"I heard 'm menshun't," said Dell. " 'S far's that's consherned, I trail m' bets with Slim. F'r money, marbles 'r chalk, he c'n whip yuh on a sheepskin, Angel."

"He couldn't whip me no time!" declared Angel.

"Le's go fin' him," suggested Boomer. "Might's well have more fight 'n' lesh talk. Whatcha shay, Angel? No, don't make fashes at me, Angel. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Yo're shore, you pale-fashed cardsharp. Slim swiped yore girl."

Angel flushed crimson and his hand streaked for his gun, but Blackwell was still sober enough to clinch with him and prevent him from drawing the gun.

"Let 'm loosh," coaxed Weed. "I'm c'n han'le him, Dell."

"You ought to keep yore mouth shut," said the bartender. "Don't start no gun-battles in here."

"Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!" roared Sorensen with a sudden burst of mirth. "Anchel vant somebody to holt him. He don't try git loose."

"You —— Swede!" snarled Angel impotently.

"Led him loose," said Sorensen. "I squirsh him."

"You —— fools, calm down!" growled the bartender. "This ain't no place to start fights."

"You hang on to yourself, Angel," warned Dell. "Weed's drunk. Don't start no gun-play, *sabe?*"

Angel shook out his twisted sleeve, glaring at Weed, who laughed owlishly at him and offered to buy a drink.

"—— you and yore drinks!" snapped Angel.

Chuck Ring came sauntering in, and Boomer immediately seized him by his belt.

"C'mon and have a drink, Chuck. I jus' had a battle with Angel. 'S a fact. He says he's goin' to crawl Slim Caldwell."

"Thasso?" Chuck looked curiously at Angel, who stood apart from them, glaring at Boomer.

"What you got agin' old Slim, McCoy?" asked Ring.

"That's my business."

"Yea-a-ah? And yuh aim to git him, eh?"

"Well?" defiantly.

"Not so —— well," said Chuck dryly. "You monkey with Slim and you'll

think the seat of yore pants got caught in the door of a volcano. Lemme tell yuh a few things, Angel. You start anythin' around here and they'll take you up on a broom. Yo're a bad actor in yore own mind. You may be able to hang the Injun-sign on old Rance McCoy, but to us yo're just another dirty shirt that needs doin' up. You play a crooked game, pardner—and that lets yuh out. Now you better trot along home and forget all that talk about gettin' Slim Caldwell. I know why yuh hate Slim. Everybody in town knows it; and if I was in yore boots I'd cut me a straight trail out of this country and not leave a single blaze."

Angel's face was colorless now, even to his lips, which were a white line across his white face, and his eyes were half-closed, twitching at the outer corners. But he made no move to show his resentment because of what Chuck had said. Angel was fast with a gun, but he knew Chuck was as fast. And there were three more guns to account for—not counting the one behind the bar, in easy reach of the bartender.

For at least ten seconds he stood there immobile, then stepped up to the bar a few feet away from Weed and asked for whisky. There was nothing of the craven about Angel. He drank alone, keeping one hand on the bottle.

"Don't be a fool," cautioned the bartender.

"I'm payin' for what I get," replied Angel evenly.

"Embalmin' his guts," said Blackwell. "Lotsa folks have to do that to keep their nerve."

But Angel did not even look toward Blackwell. As far as appearances went, he might have been an entire stranger, enjoying a few drinks alone. But Chuck watched him. He knew Angel was steeping his soul in liquor, either trying to deaden the sting of what Chuck had said, or in order to brew a fresh devil in his mind.

Chuck had no mean capacity himself, but he was human enough to get drunk in a reasonable length of time. He counted Angel's drinks in the next half-hour, and the total was twelve. Twelve drinks of raw whisky, on top of what he had already taken.

And all the effect it had was to cause Angel's lips to draw back in a sneering grin as he looked at himself in the back-bar mirror. Nor did his hand tremble as he filled the twelfth glass to the top.

Then he walked steadily to the door, where he turned and looked coldly at the group in front of the bar. All except Chuck were owl-eyed with liquor. Chuck watched him closely, anxiously. But all Angel did was to throw back his head and laugh hollowly at them, as if defying them to harm him in any way. Then he stepped outside and went up the street.

Chuck surged away from the bar, swearing softly, and went to the front door; he saw Angel go down the street, walking as straight as if he had not taken a drink. Angel stopped in front of Parker's store and seemed to be looking in the window, after which he turned and came back to the Eagle hitchrack, where he mounted his horse and rode out of town, heading toward the JML ranch.

Chuck sighed with relief as he saw Angel ride away. He did not want trouble with Angel, but he realized that it would be inevitable if Angel stayed in Red Arrow. Blackwell, Sorensen and Weed were past even the humorous stage now, so Chuck deposited them in convenient chairs, where they might slumber until closing time.

"Where'd Angel go, Chuck?" asked the bartender.

"Home."

"That's good. He's the craziest puncher I ever knew. But can't he pack liquor! Mister man, he's the hollowest human I ever knowed. Have a drink, Chuck?"

"I hope to die if I do. One more drink and the dignity of my office is all shot to ——. Good night."

Chuck went back to the office and found Scotty playing solitaire. Chuck told him about Angel.

"I wouldn't tr-rust him as far as I could throw a fr-reight wagon," declared Scotty, shoving the cards aside. "He has the same glint in his eye that ye see in the eye of an outlaw cayuse. Now where do ye suppose Slim and the two boys have gone, Chuck?"

"Slim didn't know," laughed Chuck. "He follows Hashknife around like a good old pup, with Sleepy trailin' both of 'em. But Hashknife's no fool."

"Not a —— bit o' one," agreed Scotty earnestly. "I'd hate to be in Kid Glover's boots when that tall cowpuncher meets up with him. Didja ever study the length of Hartley, takin' account of the way his muscles work. They're long, like the muscles in a snake. But he's—"

From far up the street came a wailing cry. It was repeated several times before Chuck and Scotty reached the door. It was a woman's voice crying:

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

"Fire!" called Chuck, stepping out on the sidewalk.

There were people running from Parker's store, and more from other places of business. Chuck and Scotty ran up the street and crossed over to mingle with the crowd.

"It's the Parker home!" yelled one of the men. "Get some buckets!"

Chuck raced back to the office, where he secured a large bucket and an ax. As he came through the doorway, Hashknife, Sleepy, Slim and their two prisoners rode up to the front of the office.

"Parker's house is on fire!" yelled Chuck, paying no attention to the prisoners as he raced up the street.

"I'll hold 'em," said Sleepy. "Go ahead."

Hashknife and Slim threw the lead-ropes of the prisoner's horses to Sleepy, and went galloping toward the Parker home, passing the scattered crowd, and jerking to a stop at the gate.

As yet the fire was confined to the front of the house, but blazing merrily. The door was open and the flames were billowing out, fanned by a breeze from the rear. The crowd came piling in, knocking down the picket-fence.

They headed for the well at the rear of the house, led by Jim Parker. Slim grabbed him by the arm, forcing him to stop.

"Where's Lila?" demanded Slim.

"God knows!" panted Parker. "She was at home alone. My wife was at the store, and when she came home the house was on fire."

Slim and Hashknife ran to the back door, dashed through the smoke and found the stairway. Hashknife managed to close the door between the hall and the living-room, but not until he had caught a fairly good view of the blazing interior. He caught a glimpse of the center-table lying on its side, and almost in the center of the room on the floor was the big lamp which usually stood on the table.

Almost before Hashknife had closed the door, fighting against the smoke-fumes, Slim was staggering down the stair. Together they stumbled out of the house and into the cool night air; they panted like a pair of marathon runners. Men were running back and forth from the well tossing ineffectual buckets of water through the windows, while others shouted advice which nobody heeded.

"She's not up there," panted Slim. "I was in every room."

Everybody in Red Arrow seemed to be at the fire, for word had been passed that Lila was in the house. Mrs. Parker was crying, Jim Parker swearing.

Hashknife drew Parker aside.

"Any idea how it happened, Parker?"

"——, no!"

"Lila ain't in there. Me and Slim searched."

"Thank God for that, Hartley!"

Parker ran back to tell the women. The house was doomed, and everybody seemed to realize it. Hashknife and Slim drew back nearer the fence, when the flames shot through the roof with a crackle like a machine-gun. Chuck, sweating, his shirt on fire in several places, came up to them.

"Whatsa use?" he asked. "Yuh can't do a —— thing, Slim!"

"Not a thing, Chuck. How did it get started?"

"Nobody knows. Ain't she a dinger of a fire, though? Look at her blaze!"

Dell Blackwell and Boomer Weed, still half-drunk, joined them. They had tried to carry buckets of water, but neither of them could find the well after the first trip.

"What became of Angel?" asked Boomer.

"He went home," said Chuck. "I shore told him where to head in at, didn't I?"

"'F I remember right, yuh did," agreed Blackwell dryly.

"How long ago did he go home?" asked Hashknife quickly.

"Fifteen or twenty minutes ago," replied Chuck. "Mebbe it was a little longer, but I don't think so."

"C'mon, Slim!" snapped Hashknife. "You, too, Chuck! Never mind the fire—C'mon!"

Hashknife led them back at a brisk trot. Scotty saw them going away, and followed after.

"What's the matter?" asked Chuck.

"Don't ask him," replied Slim. "Wait and see."

"WHAT didja find out, Jim?"

Jim Langley helped himself to a generous cut of beef and leaned aside to let One-Eye Connell pour him a cup of coffee.

"Didn't find out a —— thing, Jess."

"Yuh seen Hartley, yuh say?" queried Jess Fohl.

"Yeah, I saw him. One-Eye, this coffee is cold."

"Yuh didn't give me time to heat her, Jim. We had supper two hours ago. You didn't say when you'd come back."

"Heat the —— stuff up a little, will yuh?"

"What did Hartley want yuh for, Jim?" asked Briggs.

"Not a —— thing! I think you and One-Eye are loco."

"Like ——!" snorted Briggs. "Leave it to One-Eye if he didn't say he came to see yuh. By ——, he even wanted to wait for yuh. Ain't that right, One-Eye?"

"Gospel truth, Jim."

"Well, he didn't say a word to me about bein' here."

"That's what looks funny to me," said Briggs. "He's no fool, Jim. Are yuh goin' to ignore everythin' Slim told yuh about him?"

Langley swallowed a mouthful of food, blinking thoughtfully.

"He's got nothin' on us, Boomer," said Langley.

"You don't know a thing about him. Angel stayed in town, didn't he? Drinkin'?"

"That's his business; he's of age, Boomer."

"And with the brain of a five-year-old savage. He'll get drunk and pull a fight with somebody. He's sore at Slim Caldwell over that girl business. You know him well enough to sock him over the head and bring him out here roped on a bronc. By ——, I've had about enough of him myself, Jim! He ain't quite human, if yuh ask me about him."

"If yo're scared, why don't yuh quit?" asked Langley. "The road is wide open, Roper."

"I'm no quitter, Jim," quickly. "Neither am I a —— fool. My neck is worth more to me than most anythin' I've got, and I don't like to have a crazy fool riskin' it for me."

Langley shoved back his plate impatiently.

"Write yore own ticket, Boomer," he said wearily. "I'm tired of hearin' yuh complain. Let's have a round of poker."

"Here or in the bunkhouse?" asked Fohl.

"Here."

One-Eye cleared off the table, wiped up the crumbs, and stacked the dishes in a pan, while Langley produced the chip-rack and the cards.

"Yub got to stand me off for a few dollars," said Jess Fohl. "I'm plumb busted, Jim."

Roper Briggs walked through the front room and out to the front porch. It was very dark, but he could see a dull glow in the direction of Red Arrow. He watched it several moments, and then came back into the house, and picked up Langley's field-glasses.

"There's a fire in Red Arrow," he called to the boys, and went out on the porch.

They followed him out. It was rather hard to tell just where the fire was. It seemed much closer than Red Arrow.

"Must be in town," said Langley. "No house or hay-stack between here and Red Arrow."

"Jist enough wind to burn the —— town," said Fohl.

"Well, we can't help it," said Langley. "Let's play cards."

They went back and started their game, but there was an undercurrent of nervousness which caused them to play in a forced, jerky manner. Briggs continually listened, and he soon had the others doing the same.

"Aw, ——!" snorted Langley. "This makes me tired. What are you listenin' for, Roper?"

"I dunno," confessed Roper foolishly. "What's the rest of yuh listenin' for? I'm not doin' it alone."

"Well, quit it! Yuh make me jumpy. Gimme three cards, One-Eye. Three cards! My ——, can'tcha count? Not five—three!"

"Don't bark at me!" roared One-Eye, who was usually rather soft-spoken.

"Good ——, you've got it too, have yuh?" Langley threw his cards down on the table and shoved his chair back.

"What's that?" exclaimed Roper Briggs.

It was the sound of a running horse. Roper stepped to the door and flung it open, the others crowding behind him. They could head a voice swearing—Angel McCoy's voice.

Jim Langley shoved the other men aside and went striding down to the corral, followed by the others. It was so dark they could not see Angel until they were close to him. He was laughing drunkenly.

"What in —— is wrong with you, Angel?" demanded Langley.

"Wrong with me?" Angel laughed drunkenly. "Nothin' wrong with me. But by ——, I made that town set up and notice! They'll remember me, —— their dirty skins! Whoa, Sally Ann!"

"Who have you got there?" snapped Langley. "A—a woman! Angel, you —— fool! What have you done now?"

"My woman!" rasped Angel. "Git away from her, Langley!"

"A woman?" gasped Briggs.

"His woman?" wondered Fohl. "Why, the —— fool ain't—"

Langley scratched a match, shielding it from the breeze. Angel was backed against his horse, one arm flung around Lila, the other hand holding a cocked six-shooter. Lila's face was bloodless, her waist torn, a sleeve fluttering in the wind. Then the match went out.

"Oh, you fool!" wailed Briggs. "You awful fool!"

"Angel," Langley's voice shook with emotion. "Angel, have a little sense! My God, don'tcha know what you've done? C'mon in the house."

"What have I done?" Angel's voice was querulous. "I'm my own boss, ain't I? They gave me the worst of it, and I'm payin' 'em back. And I'm payin' Slim Caldwell, —— his dirty heart. Don't touch me, Langley—none of yuh."

"Come in the house," begged Langley. "Mebbe we can git things straight."

"I'll come in, Langley, but don't touch us. Go ahead—we'll come."

The men of the JML went ahead and entered the lighted kitchen. Angel had Lila's right hand gripped at the wrist, and was still carrying his cocked gun. He shoved her in ahead of him, and stood there glaring at them. He was hatless; on his face were marks that showed that Lila had not come willingly. She was panting heavily, and Langley thought she was going to faint, but when he started to get her a chair Angel threw up his gun.

"Stay where yuh are, Langley!" he said harshly.

"Sure," agreed Langley.

"Oh, let me go," begged Lila.

Angel laughed mockingly.

"The—the house was on fire," panted Lila. "We—we upset the table and the lamp fell."

"So that's what the fire was, eh?" muttered Briggs. "We could see it from here."

"Nice little blaze, eh?" laughed Angel. "Oh, they'll all remember me. I paid 'em back. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! This is good!"

"And they'll hang you so —— high!" exclaimed Briggs.

"Hang me? I wasn't born to be hung, Roper."

"But don't yuh realize what this will mean?" asked Langley. "They'll know you took her, Angel."

"How will they? Nobody seen me. They'll think she burned in the fire. Oh, I was sure she was alone. I seen Mrs. Parker in the store. That house was half-burned before anybody discovered it, I'll bet."

Langley shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"Go and take her back, Angel. Sneak around and leave her in town. If they come here after you, it'll give yuh a chance to make a getaway."

"The —— yuh say! Give her up? You must think I'm crazy."

"You can't keep her here, Angel."

"I didn't intend to. Give her up! Why, you —— fool, it took me a long time to get her this far. By ——, I didn't know a woman could fight so hard!"

"But where can yuh take her, Angel? You'll never get her out of this valley."

"Won't I? Once I get into the lava beds, all —— won't stop me."

"You crazy fool!" grunted Briggs. "You haven't a—"

Briggs had been standing with his arms folded, but now he dropped his hands, and perhaps Angel thought he was going to draw a gun. At any rate Angel's wrist crooked and the report of his revolver shot shook the room. Briggs jerked sidewise, falling into Fohl, who tried to save him and almost fell with him.

"Good God!" exclaimed Langley.

Angel was crouched forward, his gun held tensely in his hand. Lila swayed against the wall, her eyes wide with the horror.

"Keep away from me," warned Angel. "Nobody can stop me, I tell yuh. Keep yore hands where they are. By ——, I'll kill anybody who tries to stop me."

"Nobody goin' to stop yuh, Angel," said Langley. "Don't shoot any more. We'll help yuh get away."

"There's somebody comin'!" exclaimed Fohl. "Hear 'em?"

Angel released Lila in order to swing the door shut with a kick of his elbow.

"The lamp!" whispered Fohl. "They can see through a window."

With a single stride Angel reached the table and blew out the lamp.

"Keep away from me," he warned. "Don't touch me,——yuh!"

"Shut up, you fool!" hissed Fohl, bold in the darkness. "Lila, if yo're wise, get down on the floor."

"Stay where yuh are, Lila," commanded Angel.

Except for their labored breathing, there was no sound in the room. Langley had moved into the front room and was trying to see through the front windows.

"I heard several horses," whispered Fohl.

"Shut up!" hissed Angel.

"—the brain of a five-year-old savage," muttered a voice. It was Roper Briggs, talking deliriously.

"I'm no quitter," he said distinctly. "Neck's worth more to me—my—I'm thirsty! Whatcha drinkin', Jim?"

"Make that —— fool shut up!" rasped Angel.

"He's out of his head," whispered Fohl.

"Put all our necks in a noose," babbled Briggs.

"Choke that —— fool!"

"Choke him yourself—you shot him."

"Water," begged Roper.

"Can't I get him some water?" asked Lila.

"Stay where yuh are!" ordered Angel.

"Can yuh see anythin' from there, Jim?" whispered One-Eye.

"Not a thing. Are yuh sure yuh heard any—"

Some one was knocking on the front door.

"Come out, Langley."

It was Slim Caldwell's voice, hoarse with emotion.

"Sh-h-h-h!" warned Angel.

"Don't play 'possum," warned Slim. "The place is surrounded. We found Angel McCoy's horse and we know he's in there. Bring him out, Jim. And another thing—if that girl is harmed we'll hang every —— one of yuh!"

"Yuh see!" whispered Fohl bitterly. "They've got all of us, Angel. —— yore skin, I'd like to kill you!"

"Let me go out," begged Lila.

Angel laughed softly. He still had her wrist.

Roper Briggs was trying to sing:

"—for I'm a poo-o-o-oor cowboy and I know I've done wrong.
Beat the drums slowly and play the fi-i-ife lowly;
Play the dead march as you bear me alo-o-ong.

"Roper, for ——'s sake, don't sing that," begged Fohl.

"Kick him in the head," said Angel callously.

"You try it!" snapped Fohl. "If I knowed just where you was—"

"Are yuh comin' out, Langley?" asked Slim Caldwell.

"No, —— yuh!" roared Langley. "If yuh want me, come and get me."

"And that finishes everythin'," wailed One-Eye.

Angel laughed with evident pleasure.

"Laugh, you crazy ——!" Fohl whispered fiercely.

"It's a fifty-fifty bet," said Langley. "We won't go out and they don't dare come in."

"Ninety-ten," corrected One-Eye. "We'll have to come out sooner or later."

"You yaller old quitter!" sneered Angel. "We'll show 'em a trick or two, Jim."

"Take the girl upstairs," said Langley. "There's no use in her gettin' shot up."

"She goes where I go," declared Angel. "Whither thou goest, I will go, eh, Lila? Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! All my life I've wanted to fight against odds, and now I've got a chance."

"You crazy fool," said Fohl. "Why didn't yuh pick yore odds a long ways from here?"

"Quit, if yuh want to, Jess," said Langley. "Walk right out and give up. They might pad the rope for yuh."

"Aw, they can't hang us," said One-Eye hopefully.

"They can hang Angel," said Fohl, with a great deal of satisfaction.

"They'll be skatin' in —— a long time before they ever hang me," swore Angel.

"Oh, shut up," said Langley wearily. "No use snappin' at each other. We're all in on this deal. Let's plan what to do. How about makin' a break, boys? We might be lucky, eh?"

"Go ahead," said a voice outside the kitchen door. "We been wonderin' why yuh didn't."

"That's Hashknife Hartley's voice," said Fohl.

Angel swore hollowly. It sounded as if he was losing his nerve.

"How about the upstairs winders?" said One-Eye. "We could drop to the ground, Jim."

"And get shot en route, eh?" sneered Fohl. "They'd be lookin' for us to do that."

Suddenly the front door banged open. Langley, who was on the floor in the connecting doorway, fired three times toward the doorway, and then rolled into the corner. But there was no answering shot. Langley swore impotently. He had forgotten to lock the door.

"Keep out of line with the door," warned Langley.

"They're afraid of hurtin' the girl!" exclaimed Fohl. "By ——, we've got the best of 'em, Jim!"

"Water," begged Briggs. "They're burnin' the house."

"Please get him some water," said Lila. "Won't somebody get him some water?"

"Don't pay any attention to him," said Angel.

Fohl swore angrily and began moving along the floor.

"I'll get yuh some water, Roper," he said. "I may want some myself pretty soon."

"Keep out of line with that door," warned Langley.

They heard Fohl rattling a dipper in the bucket, and in a moment he was slithering back along the floor. They could hear Briggs drinking the water.

"Thank you, Mr. Fohl," said Lila.

"Shut up!" growled Angel disgustedly.

"Don't thank me, Miss," said Fohl. "Roper's my bunkie."

"What's the matter with everybody?" whispered Briggs. "It's so —— dark in here."

"Angel shot yuh, Roper. Don't yuh remember it?"

"He did? Where is he, Jess? He ain't here in the dark, is he? Oh, I remember now—that girl."

"Choke that —— fool off, will yuh?" rasped Angel.

"That's him!" panted Briggs. "I know his voice. Jess, I can't—my God, I'm as weak as a rabbit. Funny, ain't it? He hit me in the chest, Jess. I'm awful hot inside."

"What are they doin' outside?" wondered Langley.

"Fixin' to git us," said One-Eye, his voice filled with discouragement. "Let's send the girl out, Jim. She's what they want, anyway."

"Like ——, you will!" exploded Angel. "She's our ace-in-the-hole, you fool. As long as she's in here, they don't dare shoot at us."

"What's that noise?" asked Langley.

They listened closely. From the rear of the building came a sharp bump, followed by a scraping sound. None of the men was able to explain it. Langley crawled back in to the front room and went to the window on the right-hand side, but it was so dark he could not see anything.

He slid along the wall toward the front of the room. That open front door intrigued him. Once in the open, he would have a fighting chance, he thought. The rest of them could take care of themselves. He reached the doorway and waited, straining his ears for any sound. Except for the slight rustle of the wind all was quiet.

He stretched out flat, gun in hand, and began inching over the door-sill. His belt-buckle caught on the sill; he twisted sidewise to release it, when something crashed down on his head and he ceased crawling. But he still continued to move slowly ahead across the porch, drawn by the arms of a man who chuckled softly. It sounded much like the chuckle of Sleepy Stevens.

Roper Briggs had been talking brokenly.

"Where's Langley?" demanded Angel in a hoarse whisper.

"Over by one of the front winders," replied One-Eye.

"I think he went upstairs," said Fohl. "I heard him."

"I thought I heard him up there," said Angel. "I wish them —— would start somethin'."

"Don't worry—they will," assured Fohl. "You kidnaped Slim Caldwell's girl, yuh remember—and he's out there. Why didn't yuh rob a bank or kill somebody, instead of what yuh done? Give yoreself a fightin' chance, Angel."

"Jim's comin' down," said One-Eye.

They heard him crawling from the stairway, the knees of his overalls rasping softly on the floor.

"See anybody, Jim?" asked Fohl.

"No," he whispered. "Where are yuh, Angel?"

"Over here," growled Angel. "What do yuh want, Jim?"

"I've got a scheme."

"Make up yore mind to come out, folks."

It was Slim Caldwell's voice, speaking near the kitchen door.

"You go to ——!" snapped Angel. "We're not comin' out. And lemme tell yuh somethin' else, Caldwell—this girl ain't comin' out neither. You start anythin', and she'll suffer for it!"

Slim made no reply to Angel's threat. Came the sound of some one changing his position on the floor, a gurgle, which might have been a curse—the sound of a blow.

"What in —— was that?" demanded Fohl. "Angel, did you hit that girl?"

"I—I'm all right," gasped Lila. "What—"

"Fohl!"

It was not Jim Langley's voice.

"Who in —— was that?" asked One-Eye quickly. "That ain't Jim's voice!"

"What do yuh want?"

Fohl's voice was high-pitched, nervous.

"The game is up, boys," said Hashknife Hartley. "Unless I'm mistaken, Jim Langley is plumb safe. Angel is out of the fight. One of yuh light the lamp."

"Well, I'll be a —— liar!" exclaimed One-Eye. "It's Hartley, Jess. Go easy. My ——, we're—"

"I'll light it," said Fohl. "I'm through, so don't shoot."

He managed to find the lamp, and after breaking several matches he lighted the wick. Hashknife squatted on his heels against the kitchen door, his six-shooter leveled from his knee, a grin on his lips. Angel was stretched out on his face; in the corner was Lila, bracing herself on one elbow, wide-eyed, a smudge of dirt across her cheek.

Roper Briggs was lying against the opposite wall, his head fallen forward on his chest, and near him was One-Eye Connell, blinking his remaining optic at everything. Fohl had backed away from the table where he had placed his gun and was holding his hands shoulder-high.

"All right, cowboy?" yelled Sleepy from the front door.

"All set!" yelled Hashknife, and in came Sleepy, Slim and Chuck, their guns ready for anything that might happen.

"Yuh kinda busted up the nest, didn't yuh?" laughed Sleepy.

Slim went straight to Lila and helped her to her feet. She was beyond words, as she clung to his arm.

"It's all right," he told her.

"It's all right," echoed Jess Fohl. "We was a lot of fools to try and help him out. I'm glad we didn't hurt anybody, 'cause that kinda lets us out. Angel shot Roper Briggs."

Hashknife looked curiously at Fohl.

"Let's you out, eh?" He turned to Sleepy. "Go upstairs and get the old man."

"Old man who?" asked Sleepy.

"Old Rance McCoy."

"My God, is he here, too?" exclaimed Slim.

Sleepy lighted another lamp and went up the stairs. Angel groaned and sat up, blinking foolishly. His eyes were dull and he swung his head like a sick animal.

"Yuh must 'a' popped him a good one, Hashknife," said Slim.

"I shore did. That old ladder done the trick. It let me in that upstairs window, and I was at the bottom of the stairs, when I heard somebody get slugged at the front door. And when I heard somebody ask for Langley, I knew he was the missin' link; so I played Langley long enough to whisper to Angel with my gun barrel."

Angel sat up. His head was clearing fast, and his eyes flashed to Lila, who was standing close to Slim. No one was paying any attention to Roper Briggs who had lifted his head and was peering across the room at Angel. Briggs had a gun beneath the crook of his knee and his groping fingers closed around it.

Sleepy was coming back down the stairs, making plenty of noise, for he was half-carrying old Rance McCoy, who was barefoot, naked to the waist and hardly able to take a step.

"The old boy's in bad shape," panted Sleepy. "Don't *sabe* what it's all about. Cussed —— out of me."

As they turned to look at the old man, blinking in the lamplight, Angel grasped the corner of the table and surged to his feet. At the same instant he saw Jess Fohl's six-shooter on the table, and as quick as a flash he grabbed it with his right hand.

"—— yuh!" he said chokingly. "My turn, by ——! If yuh move I'll—"

But Angel didn't finish his threat. Roper Briggs had shot from his twisted position on the floor, and Angel buckled at the knees, striking his shoulders against the table, falling backward in the center of the room.

Roper chuckled and slid forward. The jar of the shot seemed to shock old Rance to a semblance of himself. He peered at Lila through the haze of powder smoke.

"Lila, why are you here?" he asked hoarsely. "What's it all about, anyway?"

"Angel kidnaped her, Rance," said Slim. "He was drunk and crazy. Langley is a prisoner, and I think Angel is dead."

"He's dead?" Old Rance limped forward, looking down at him. Hashknife made a quick examination, nodding slowly.

"I'm sorry, Rance," he said. "He can't blame anybody."

"Let me set down," said Rance wearily. "Yuh see, they burned my feet, tryin' to make me tell where the money was. But I didn't tell."

"Did Angel do that to yuh, Rance?"

"Not Angel—Langley. Angel wasn't in on it."

"The —— he wasn't!" snorted Fohl. "He was the one that framed it all, Rance."

"Yore own son," said Hashknife.

Rance looked curiously at Hashknife.

"He—he framed it all? He thought *I* robbed that train? My God, I thought he done it."

"You thought he knocked you down and robbed you the night of the robbery, didn't yuh, Rance?" asked Hashknife.

"I was pretty sure he did, and I didn't want anybody to suspect him."

"Billy DuMond robbed you that night," said Hashknife. "But why did you take Angel's I.O.U. for seventy-eight hundred, Rance?"

"I never thought about DuMond doin' it. I—I wanted to help Angel out. He was busted, so I took his I.O.U."

"That's what Langley and Angel were tryin' to find at the Circle Spade," said Hashknife. "I thought it was."

"But did you know Rance was here?" asked Slim.

"Suspected it, Slim."

"Roper said yuh did," said Fohl. "He was scared."

"Butch Reimer and Kid Glover are in jail, Jess," said Chuck. "They've confessed to robbin' the train. Glover killed DuMond and Corby."

"My God!" blurted Fohl. "Old Rance didn't know anythin' about it—and Langley burned his feet to make him tell."

"It hurt like ——," said old Rance simply.

He was staring at Angel, whose white face showed in the lamplight.

"Heredity," he said slowly. Then he looked up at Hashknife. "Do you believe in it, Hartley?"

"Not much."

Lila was looking at old Rance, her eyes wide.

"I didn't, Hartley. Jim Stevens did. He was educated, dyin' from consumption, and one of the whitest men God ever made. His wife went insane. Tried to kill him. They took her to the asylum, where she died."

Old Rance sighed and shook his head wearily.

"I've kept still all these years, boys, but I'm tellin' it now. I was broke. My wife was dead and I had a kid to take care of, so I robbed a bank. But they blocked me, and I had to drop the money.

"I got away and headed for my shack. I knew I was caught, but I aimed to put up a fight. As I went through the doorway, I thought they had beat me to it. A man was there, and I shot him."

Old Rance looked around at the tense faces of the men.

"Yeah, I shot him. It was Jim Stevens—he came to see me. Poor old Jim—my only friend at that time. I told him what had happened and he forgave me. He said it didn't make any difference. I reckon I was half-crazy. And then he asked me if they had recognized me.

"I didn't think they had. And then he made me a proposition. Boys, it was a sneakin' thing to do; but I put my coat and hat on him, strapped my belt on him, took my extra gun and fired it down through a hole in the floor, so it wouldn't make much noise.

"Them men was comin'. They was sure the holdup man went to my cabin. But before they surrounded us, I went to the door and waved to 'em to come on. They found old Jim on the floor. I swore I didn't know what it was all about—that Jim ran in on me, and we swapped shots.

"They told me what Jim had done. They knowed he was the right man, because of that old gray coat. They took him away, wonderin' what would happen to Jim's kid. But I told 'em I'd take it. They knew old Jim was my friend, and none of 'em wanted the kid, anyway.

"But old Jim had my promise before he died. I swore I'd never let the kid know anythin' of the truth. Jim believed in heredity. He said it was partly a state of mind, and if the kid never knew—mebbe it would be all right. And I never told anybody, boys. I kept my oath to old Jim Stevens. Even when things went agin' me I stuck it out."

Lila went to him and put an arm around his shoulders.

"And they said you had no conscience!" she sobbed. "Oh, I'm so sorry, Daddy Rance. I went away when you needed me, but I'm going to stay with you now. I don't believe in heredity."

Old Rance looked up at her, his eyes wet with tears.

"I'm a —— old fool, Lila," he said. "I sacrificed my own to keep my word. Don't you see what I mean, Lila? Jim Stevens' baby was a boy!"

For several moments no one said a word. They were trying to understand what old Rance meant.

"You—you mean—Angel?" whispered Lila.

Old Rance nodded quickly.

"Billy DuMond got it kinda twisted," he said. "I hope we can find some slippers around here; I can't wear boots."

"And you can all thank Hashknife," said Slim, looking around. "He dug it all out for us. Where's Hashknife?"

"Where's Sleepy?" asked Chuck.

But nobody knew. They had tiptoed their way out, mounted their horses, and were heading for Red Arrow, leaving the sheriff and Chuck to mop up things. Neither of them could stand to be thanked.

THEY found Scotty McKay at the office, along with a dozen other men, including Jim Parker. They were waiting some word from Slim regarding Lila, and almost mobbed Hashknife and Sleepy for information.

"She's safe," said Hashknife. "Angel McCoy and Roper Briggs are dead; they shot each other. Angel kidnaped Lila and upset the lamp in Parker's house. Rance McCoy is all right. Langley and his gang were tryin' to force him to tell where the loot from the express car was cached. Slim is bringin' 'em all in, and you'll get the whole story from him. Was there any telegram, Scotty?"

Wonderingly, Scotty handed Hashknife the telegram, which had been sent to Slim Caldwell. It read:

PAULSEN CONFESSED ARREST REIMER GLOVER DUMOND CONGRATULATIONS YOU WIN THE REWARD.

WELLS FARGO.

Hashknife grinned and handed the telegram back to Scotty.

"Well, that shore settles it," he said. "C'mon, Sleepy."

The crowd stepped aside and let them go. No one said anything. Possibly the men were so shocked over what had

happened that night that they didn't know what to say.

Hashknife and Sleepy went to the hotel and got their war-bags, mounted their horses and rode southward out of Red Arrow. Some one called to them from the sheriff's office, but they did not heed. Their work was over, and nothing remained to be done.

"It shore feels good to have a *horse* between yore legs again, Sleepy," said Hashknife. "That Half-Box R bay was all right, but nothin' like Ghost. It's a funny thing what a simple horse trade will lead to. Kid Glover's bay picks up a sharp rock, and from there she rolls bigger and bigger, like a snow-ball rollin' down a hill. But it was all right, pardner. We'll get to Arizona before snow flies in this country. Things like this kinda break the monotony, don'tcha know it?"

"There was five thousand dollars reward," reminded Sleepy.

"Yeah, there was. And it'll be a good thing for Slim and Lila to start housekeepin' on."

"Yeah, that's true, Hashknife. It was plenty fun, but not a —— bit remunerative."

"It ain't what yuh get, Sleepy; it's what yuh learn."

"What in —— didja learn?"

"I learned that when an old jigger like Rance McCoy gives his word, it makes blood a —— sight thinner than water."

"Shore, but what good will that ever do you?"

"It builds up my faith in humanity."

"Anyway, we got yore horse, Hashknife; and that's what we went after."

"Which is all anybody could ask, pardner."

And they rode on toward Arizona, while back in Red Arrow the people wondered where they had gone. Butch Reimer returned the money, and the judge gave him few enough years for his crime. Kid Glover paid the penalty of his murders, while Langley, Fohl and One-Eye Connell served short terms.

Rance McCoy got his money back which DuMond stole that night, and later he sold the Eagle for enough to get back the twenty-five hundred that he lost on the crooked deal. As for Slim Caldwell, he resigned his office when he and Lila were married, and went into business with Rance McCoy on the Circle Spade.

Chuck Ring is the sheriff now, and he takes all the credit for solving the case. Chuckwalla twists his mustaches and chuckles when Lila says, "Chuckwalla Ike, go sit on a spike," and spends his time poring over a cook-book which was sent to him from Phoenix. There was no name of the sender, but on the wrapper was a crudely drawn hashknife brand.

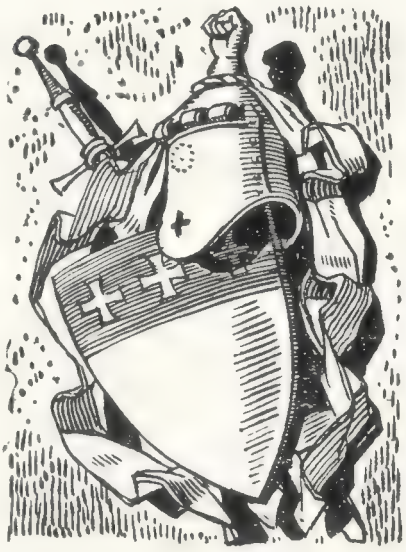
And somewhere under an Arizona sun, heading toward the next hill, ride Hashknife and Sleepy, contented with their past, smiling into the future—following the lure of the dim trails.

THE END

Death Warrant

By

F. R. BUCKLEY



A NOVELETTE

TO GIOVANNI the son of Andrea, likely a cultivator in the village of Tassi, in the Romagna; from Luigi Caradosso, captain of horse, now in the field near Naples, these:

Sire—

I trust that thy father, despite his enthusiasm, hath brought thee up somewhat clerkly; because it would be great pity that the following marvels, written in fulfillment of an ancient promise and despite a pistol-ball under the right shoulder, should either pass unread or fall into the hands of the village priest.

I was a fool to undertake this narration of thy family history, but at the time I swore to prepare this account of it for thine eighteenth birthday, it seemed unlikely that I should live to suffer from the oath. Moreover, I was then scarce fifty, and new-enamored of the pleasures of writing; also, as captain of the guard to a well established count, I had, for the rest of my life as I thought, warm quarters wherein to write and a clerk to handle the quill if I tired. Little did I foresee myself in this leaky tent, with an ague coming on, trying to redeem my promise.

Two days later.

THE ENEMY interrupted me by a most clumsy attack. Was it to be thought that I, Luigi Caradosso, should go into camp without keeping at least two hundred men alert on each flank? Can some one have spread the tale that I am mad? If so, he did the enemy a rude service; we broke them into three pieces across the column, and cut those three into six down the center, and chased the six until they broke into some three thousand, each piece a fleeing man. Whereof we rode down some thousand and hanged five hundred more.

So I come back to this task with a lighter heart and a clearer head, my ague having passed with the sweat of battle; and I perceive that up to now I have not been too plain with thee. I gather that the bull gored thy father to death before thou wert at an age to be interested in soldiers; and by now, doubtless, thou art racking thy brain to know who am I, and what is all this pother about.

Know, then, that four years before thy birth, I was captain of the guard of the Duke of Venieto, a prince who lived, and whose successors still hold sway, seven

The story of a philanthropist duke of old Italy

days' journey to the north of thy village. The duchy, I am told, is much reduced in size and in repute, though the reigning family hath amassed much private wealth. The present duke hath married a goldsmith's daughter, and they spend her fortune in making battlements into pergolas, culverins into flower-pots and the army into a gallantry show. I hear that the captain of the guard performeth upon the lute.

Which will not enmarvel thee greatly because, as a grower of cabbages then unborn, thou wast not acquainted with the conduct of the duchy in my day; that is, under the rule of Guglielmo the Stern. He was passing poor—had not even the money to equip us with iron cannon, but he would certes have hanged any who suggested goldsmith's wenches as candidates for marriage with the right hand; and under him the duchy did continually add to itself new lands and new honor.

This was because Guglielmo was, to the minds of such as we are, either mad or inspired from on high, which is the same thing after recognition by the Church. Despite the daily assurance of his own senses that he had but two legs, two arms, two eyes, one brain and so forth, like the rest of humanity, he utterly believed himself to be some creation in a different mode—and for aught I know, by a different Maker.

Compelled, as of course he was, to do many things which were done likewise by the humblest inhabitant of his lands—to eat, to drink, for instance; to marry and to discuss his affairs—he so bedecked these functions, so swaddled them, so wrapped them round with things much more taking to the eye of the populace, that they were invisible. And even I, long wise in the ways of princes, at last gathered the idea that Guglielmo, if not divine, was above the mortal.

It was with this idea in the back of my skull that I led the charge at Ravenna, and lost three fingers; stood with our half-burst guns near that town whose name I forget, and was left for dead; helped likewise with the Mantuan negotiations, which were no work for a soldier and which make me wince now.

I have said that the duke was poor; I will add that he was over seventy and had a weak stomach. For all of which reasons he dined, as often as not, on onion soup such as we had in the guard-room. But he knew that, in eating such victual, he would be preparing a mutiny for himself, a revolution—thou wilt not see why, sire, and I can not pause to explain—and so presto! the onion soup was onion soup no longer. It was the duke's pottage.

The very cook who prepared it looked at the mess with reverence; the lackey who took it to the hall and handed it to

the chamberlain, who gave it to the taster, who gave it to the officer who placed it before the duke—all, with the stuff steaming under their noses, would have sworn on their salvation that it was not onion soup but some liquid manna such as only dukes could take.

The stuff gained much from the gold in which it was served; much more from me and my file of men, always present in full armor; but most from the aspect and manner of the duke himself, who could dribble food on his white whiskers and make strange noises in his spoon, and yet never for an instant seem like an old man supping broth.

Similarly, he could bargain with a neighboring prince about farthings on a dowry, yet leave hearers believing themselves to have been present at a mighty affair of state, only to be conducted by the blood royal; and he could browbeat, bully, and threaten with imprisonment his only son, without putting any one in mind of a peasant father thrashing his lad for laziness in the fields.

But why do I write at such length? As well talk to thee of the science of cavalry maneuver.

It is with this only son that we have business, sire. His name was Pietro, and he was a sickly lad of twenty. He was betrothed to the Countess Maria di Testoni, daughter of that neighboring lord with whom Guglielmo discussed the dowry; and the duke was woundily set on it that Pietro should wed her before he died of the chest-illness.

The boy was ever deadly pale, with a racking cough, and he used to slink about the castle so quietly that I have seen men on guard cross themselves in the idea that he was already dead, and visiting the sentry posts from another world. At the meals he shared with his father, he was wont to sit mum as an egg, staring at the golden coat-of-arms on his plate and eating nothing.

At the audiences and progresses and state church-goings and such-like, he would walk in his prescribed place with his eyes fixed on nothing, and would say what was necessary or do what he had to do, very much in the manner of a man that hath had a blow on the head.

Only once did I see him show a sign of life—a sign of which I thought much later. It was when, on a state visit to the Testoni, he and the escort were benighted without a tent or more food than the few crusts and bottles of wine that happened to be in the men's saddlebags.

We made him some kind of shelter out of horse-cloths and lances, and under this he sat, eating with appetite until old Ugo, the chamberlain, came and insisted on pouring his wine for him. When I, having forgotten ceremony in the business of making camp, had handed him the bread and the bottle, the young man had almost smiled; now, suddenly, his hunger seemed to desert him, and he spoke to Ugo, dismissing him in peevish wise.

And by the time we reached the castle, where he held parley with his bride-to-be before her parents and several officials, he was listless as ever, and with a worse cough than before.

Methought that night in the open would finish him, so ill was he on his return to Venieto; but, as it came to pass, the Duke Guglielmo was to die first. His heart suddenly failed him as he walked up the stairs from supper to his bed. He staggered first against the four pages who preceded him with candles, then he fell back against me, who was following with the four guards to be posted at his door; and in a few minutes, having been placed full dressed on his bed, he passed away, rattling in his throat very much after the manner of ordinary men. Even so, he did not die according to the physician; it was just that his soul was received into Paradise.

So the young Pietro became Duke of Venieto.

In camp by some accursed river, after one week.

WILL folk never learn that rearguard actions are my strongest point? Meseems not; most-like when I am ninety there will be some beardless

youth to flatter himself that when I retreat it means that he hath the victory. Well, God rest the soul of him who thought it this time; and praise Heaven, this war is finished.

I would this narrative were in the same case.

To continue:

It would be bootless to describe to thee what-like a funeral the old duke had. It was conducted with the greatest pomp and attended by dozens of nobles who, having known Guglielmo, yawned openly at his grave; and by hundreds of poor folks that had only met his tax-gatherers, and so wailed unceasingly that they had lost their father.

As for me, I had my work cut out, managing a troop swathed to the neck—men and horses—in thick black cloth, and this in the hottest month of the year. There was only one thing for which the most devout could thank God, that Pietro failed to follow the funeral with the customary feast to the peasantry.

My lieutenant came in with some tale that the young Duke thought burials no time for gorging and guzzling, and that he planned to hold a fiesta a month or two hence; but I was busy with the troop accounts, sitting in my quarters with a pot of wine, and I paid little attention beyond thinking that Pietro was woefully ignorant as yet. One may gorge while the corpse is yet new in the grave; but if not then, so to do within a year is irreverence. Having mused upon which, I took off my shirt, which was all that remained to me except my hose, wiped my brow—it was August—and returned to work.

After some minutes, I perceived with the tail of my eye that some one had entered and was standing near the door. He could not sit, because of set policy I keep but one chair in the room and sit in that myself.

"Captain," says the newcomer, hesitant.

"Stand to attention, and wait till I speak to thee," says I; and was about to continue with my ells of black cloth and my enumeration of the bannerets lost off the lances, when I saw my visitant advance toward me.

And, rising to correct this infraction of discipline, I saw that it was the new duke.

"No matter, Captain," says he as I began to stammer. "And leave thy hose alone, man. They suffice."

He took the chair I had abandoned, shoved my papers to one end of the table and motioned me to seat myself on the space left vacant. Also, he unbuttoned his coat and shirt down to the stomach and commenced to fan himself with a bunch of pens.

"But, sire—" says I, wondering whether I was heat-struck.

"Sit down, sit down!" says Pietro testily. "To see thee standing makes my legs tired—and they're weary enough after yesterday's mummeries. Did'st thou remark my cousin during the procession?"

"The count Rudolfo, sire?"

"Aye. Didst thou remark him?"

"Sire, he was present."

"Aye. And who, wouldst thou have said, was the greater mourner—Rudolfo or myself?"

I began to feel woundily uncomfortable.

"Why, sire—"

"Come, now. In honesty, which?"

"Why, sire, I was so occupied—keeping back the crowd—er—and—"

"Well, I'll tell thee then," says Pietro, leaning forward in his chair and hammering the table with his fist. "I am weary of my cousin, Captain Caradosso; I have been weary of him these long days, and since yesterday, by ——, I am minded to take order with him. He may have a taste for posture and posing, like my revered father whose soul may the angels receive; but whereas my father was of a great age, Rudolfo is no older than myself, and I will not be postured upon. I am his superior as a noble, and if he affects a heavier mien than mine he must be brought to sense. Now!"

Perspiring even more violently than the weather gave me cause, I stared at Pietro somewhat in the manner of a

stuck pig—now there at last, sire, is a figure that thyself will appreciate. It is none so easy, after a life spent in palaces and camps, to find them for thee.

I stared thus for two reasons: first, that it was impossible for me either to condemn Rudolfo to the duke or to remain silent and thus seem to defend him; and secondly, that I feared grief at his father's death, or joy at succeeding to the title, had unhinged my lord's brain. Certes, his manner was not such as I would have believed possible from him; but on the other hand, madness does not generally cure coughs, and since his entry, I noticed, Pietro had not coughed once.

"Well?" says he, as I sat silent.

"It would seem," says I carefully, "to be rather a matter to be discussed with the officers of state, sire—"

"Discuss one puff-bladder with a dozen other puff-bladders!" mocks the duke. "Nay, nay, good Caradosso. Besides, this will be business for soldiers."

At this what hair I had stood straight on my head. He was indeed mad. Five minutes after his accession, he was to declare war on his own cousin!

He now took a drink out of my pot, laughed, and laid his hand on my knee. This convinced me that he was not only mad but dangerous.

"My friend," says he, "strive not to be a fool. I have long marked thee out as one not totally devoid of understanding. Belie not thyself by thinking me mad when for the first time in my life I am free to act as a sane man. Ask thyself which is the lunatic—he who eats when he is hungry, drinks when he is thirsty, laughs when he is glad, and weeps when he is t'other way, or he who, like Rudolfo, must have a banquet whether he is hungry or not, wine though his taste be for water, and who expresseth emotion he doth not feel by means of ten officials and half a troop of horse? Eh?"

"Your Highness would be a better judge than myself," I told him, wishing in the name of God that he would go hand himself over to his physicians.

He got up, finished the wine and regarded me scornfully.

"They have woundily befooled thee, Caradosso," says he. "So much the better that I am not to be deceived. I tell thee for thy better knowledge that I am done with all this masquerading and foolery. I have had twenty years of pretending that I am what no one ever was, and of watching all around me play the same dull game. Henceforth, I will act like a man and not as an effigy. Mark that! And in sign of it, have the troop ready to march by six tomorrow morning."

I choked.

"But, sire—"

"It is an order," says he, waving his hand. "See it done. Being human, and misliking my cousin's ways, I will put a stop to them. *A rivederci*, Captain."

I SAT for the rest of the afternoon with my head in my hands. The young man was mad, but what was I to do? My orders had hitherto come from the council, but the power to command was the duke's. And how should I appeal to the council against its master? For reasons of discipline, I could not appeal to my lieutenant for advice; I had no senior. Meseemed, toward the close of the day, that my only course was to obey orders, come what might.

So that, to make a long story short, we rode out the next morning, the Duke Pietro at our head and all the officials of the castle gaping at us out of their bedroom windows, and took the road for the Count Rudolfo's domain.

Never have I made such an uncomfortable march, short though it was, and the weather sunny yet cool. The troop, though without notice that anything strange was toward, seemed uneasy—I could feel that with the back of my neck; and by my side cantered Pietro, acting in such wise as would sow astonishment in a regiment of angels. He had a spot of red in each cheek; from time to time he would actually laugh aloud and sniff the breeze which blew across flower-gardens; and

instead of riding ten paces ahead of me as the regulation is—the old duke had made it twenty—he rode boot to boot and talked continually.

"Look 'ee, Captain," says he at last, after certain remarks on the condition of the crops, "this expedition against my cousin is to be no bloody business. I bear him no malice. 'Tis just that I have woundy strong views on the ruling of domains and I would fain convert him to them. Meseems that to make his folk happy, a prince should show himself as what he is, a man, and so knowing the needs of man. Who could have believed such a thing of my father?"

I swallowed something and crossed myself, and said that his late Highness had been much beloved.

"He was much feared," says Pietro, "as I know, having feared him all my life. And he was very miserable, as I know, having acted like him perforce and been very miserable myself. That's a pretty cottage, Caradosso, is't not? A good place for an old war-dog in retreat, eh?"

"Yes, sire," I answered in heartfelt-wise. I would have given something to be inside that hovel with my armor off, at that moment.

"Aye. Well, it maketh me sad even to see Rudolfo wasting his life in a capacity of straw-stuffed demi-god; it angereth me, rather, and then I am woe on the poor lad's own account."

At this I turned and looked at my senior sergeant who was following two horses' lengths behind me. The poor man's jaw was dropped and his eyes were staring. Straw stuffed demi-god! Poor lad! One nobleman speaking of another before commoner! Lord have mercy!

"It would be better to listen, Captain," says Pietro, quite mildly. "I come to the point: Arriving at my cousin's castle unexpectedly, we will disarm the guard without bloodshed, take my cousin prisoner and return to Venieto. There, since his council will not be present, I may expound my ideas to him without formality. Moreover, seeing my mode of rule in practise, he will certes come to prefer it to his own. He will have but the suit he stands in, for one thing; that should help his conversion much."

"We shall be in sight from the battlements, sire, at the next turn of the road."

Pietro clicked with his tongue.

"Ah, then we had better proceed at the gallop or Rudolfo will receive us in state."

"Does Your Highness permit me to give the order?" says I, as the formality is in such cases.

"Have I not just told thee to do so?" asks Pietro. "Why waste breath?"

So we galloped, and came up to the castle gates, where the guard of that wall, under a lieutenant, was turned out in pretty order to greet us. Pietro, having acknowledged the salute—his father never had in all his life—sat for a moment still upon his horse, smiling and breathing quickly, like a boy that hath found a rare bird's nest.

"I shall be obliged if the lieutenant will march his men outside the gates," says he at last.

"Outside, sire?" gasps the officer.

"Aye, outside. They stand so still that I doubt their capacity to move. About fifteen paces, Lieutenant, if you please."

How my heart bled for the poor man! Yet what was he to do? He stammered out the requisite orders, and the evolution was carried out.

"Magnificent!" says Pietro. "Captain, oblige me by advancing our troop into the courtyard."

"Forward!" says I; the sergeant echoed it; and in we rode.

Pietro leaned over to me.

"Have half a dozen men dismount and close the gates," he whispered. "Then leave half the troop to stand guard over them. Quick!"

That was done, too. I, a soldier, with a soldier's feelings, gave the order which locked that wretched lieutenant out of his post; he standing there with his file of men meantime, all presenting arms, and all petrified.

"Now," says Pietro, dismounting without aid from the four liveried and pop-eyed lackeys who were to help him, "I will

rush in and see my cousin, leaving you, Captain, to disarm the rest of the guard and lock them into their own guardroom or some such place. Lose no time, or we may have trouble. If I beckon from the head of the stairs, follow me—with a dozen men; the guard will be there. Let each of your men throw himself on one of Rudolfo's, disarm him and take him away."

I was breathless; I was bemazed; I had not even time to say my customary, "But, sire—" before that lunatic youth had left me and gone bounding, two at a time, up the stone stairs leading to the Count Rudolfo's great hall. As he entered, he turned and made me such a gesture as one lad, entering a theater, makes to another to announce that he hath found a seat; and, in the firm conviction that the world was coming to an end within the hour, I dismounted three files and clanked in his wake.

The men, naturally, could not say, "But, Captain—" or any other word; but never shall I forget their faces as, covered with sweat and dust, they entered the hall and faced the dozen polished guardsmen that surrounded Count Rudolfo. The count, despite the strangeness of the hour and the shortness of his notice of our coming, was in a robe of ceremony. All his household was present, similarly decked out; and as I entered Rudolfo was trying to give Pietro the customary kiss of greeting.

"No time for humbug," says the duke. "I—"

"Meseems," says Rudolfo, "that it must be some urgent affair of state, cousin, to bring thee hither in such guise."

"Meaning that I can talk of important matters in rags," says Pietro, "but to babble nothings I must fig out in ermine and the like. Ha! Well, Captain? Your orders?"

The men behind me knew what they had to do—Pietro had spoken loud enough. All of them were veterans of a dozen battles, there was scarce an unsplit nose or a normal ear in the dozen of them. But they hesitated, looking at me like schoolboys. And, lacking an order for such circumstances as this, I was fain to overcome the paralysis of my limbs and set an example by hurling myself at the captain of the opposing guard.

He was an old acquaintance of mine; as he fell, and as I snatched his sword out of his hand, thereafter sitting on his chest, he gasped forth—

"Luigi! Art thou mad?"

To which I could give him no answer beyond a wink. Meantime each of my men had tackled an adversary and brought him amazed to the ground.

"And now, wilt thou come with me peaceably, Rudolfo?" asks the duke, "or must I do likewise with thee?"

"Sire—" babbles a councilor from the duke's right.

"Silence, goat!" says Pietro; and then, seeing that his cousin was feeling, though still incredulous and bedazzled, for a dagger or some such, he sprang upon him and brought him to earth with a crash. Rudolfo's noble head, indeed, hit the marble floor with such force as to stun him; and there he lay, robe of ceremonial and all, until Pietro scrambled to his feet and picked him up in his arms.

"Now, when thou'st locked up these fellows, Captain," says he, "we will leave by the south gate. Certes that guard will not have recovered from its dismay enough to change position, and by the time they see us move, 'twill be too late for them to reach the gate by the circuit of the walls—not counting that they are afoot."

So we went our way unhindered.

Sire, I can not write more to day. Memory is a strange thing—or perhaps it is my ague returning after all.

Since I have written what stands above, I am once more in a cold sweat.

After ten days.

IT WAS the ague, but no matter. I should have sweated without it, thinking of that day and the days that followed. One thing alone gave me some comfort in my bewilderment, and that

was the spectacle of the grave signors whose business it was to maintain ceremony and solemnity, more bewildered still than myself. Their state was indeed far worse than mine; for whereas, all said, I had but to obey orders very different from any I had hitherto obeyed, they, having for sole function the maintenance of tradition, now found themselves occupationless. And, having spent long lives dealing uniquely in respect, reverence and the like, now suddenly found reverence a drug on the market and themselves in no wise respected.

I heard two white-bearded functionaries—the chamberlain and the taster, unless I mistake—chatting together one day, and my heart bled for them. Because of the heat, I was taking my siesta in a small turret on the south battlements; and these despised and rejected of men placed themselves under an arrow-slit. They were dressed for the afternoon in the most formal style, and scorned the seat offered by the thickness of the wall.

They held themselves bolt upright as though they had been at the worst of the old Duke's levees; and they vented their spleen against the young duke in such diplomatic language that I forget what they said. 'Twas to the effect, though, that he was doubtless mad; and that he would come—and the duchy with him—to a bad end. One of them even hinted that the Count Rudolfo was a preferable lord; whereat the other, who at eighty or so had lost that hot seventy-year-old blood that flowed in the first speaker, changed the subject hastily.

"Doubtless, sir," says he gravely, "Your Honor noticed His Grace's remark to the deputation of townspeople begging him not to give the fiesta he had projected?"

"I was absent from the occasion," says the taster. "It was not my strict duty to be present, and I thought thus to mark my disapproval of the admission of such rabble. His Grace acceded?"

"Such was the case. But in so doing he called the burgesses fools. I thought it a good sign."

"Ah!" sighed the taster, "but regarding them as fools, doth he rejoice therein and make profit of the fact? Nay, sir. He calleth them fools with intent to make them otherwise."

"Ah!" sighs the chamberlain, shaking his head so that meseemed I could hear his beard swish. "Alack!"

And they went away. So did I, having arrangements to make for the state visit of the Countess Maria Testoni and her father, which was fixed for the morrow.

Have I said that by this time Pietro had been three months upon the throne? I perceive that in the agitation of my memory, I have not. During these three months I had seen little of the duke; he had seemed to lose interest in me when that he saw that I could not be at ease with him. And he had, besides, abolished all those of my duties which had brought me into contact with his father.

There was no longer an armed file behind his place at table; no escort saw him to bed; there was not even a sentry at his door. He had, seemingly, no interest in the affection or disaffection of the populace, so that I was commanded to dismiss all the spies. With his own hand he struck from the rolls two men listed as musician and pastry-cook, but in fact bravos—good, steady, honest murderers whose like it is hard to find. And to my protests about these dismissals Pietro had replied rather sternly:

"My rule, Captain, is not to be founded on such doings as all these, but on quite others. Last week the whole crop in four villages to the south was destroyed by lightning, as thou knowest. To these villages I have remitted all their taxes until such time as another crop shall be ready. Dost thou not agree that that edict shall avail me more than these spies and throat-cutters, whose pay I am going to distribute among the afflicted?"

"As Your Highness pleases," says I, and he sighed wearily and motioned me to the door.

Now rumor had it he was urging the Countess Maria's father to set forward the date of the marriage, regardless

entirely of the prescribed period of state mourning, for no other reason than that he was lonely! It was the third secretary to the secretary of state told me this, one night when he got drunk in my quarters. It appeared, even, that the duke had dictated the very letter, word for word, instead of commanding the secretary to compose it.

"'A said 'a wouldn't have his love letters go out under the great seal," says the clerk, falling out of the chair I had given him and continuing his narration from the floor. "Love—hic—letters! A duke! Hic—shameful! Indecent!"

At this, he rolled over and went to sleep, first murmuring that before we were any of us much older, His Grace would be putting pen to paper with his own hand.

Now the Testoni were coming, the which surprized me, until I reflected that certes rumor had likewise spread abroad, and that they would be fain to know whether the reports of Pietro's madness were true; likewise to see into the verity of his abduction of Rudolfo, whom I had scarce seen since his arrival in Venieto.

Since to appear before inferiors shorn of reverence and ceremony would have been as unthinkable as to walk through the city in his shirt, the count had kept his rooms; eaten there and taken the air nowhere but upon a balcony invisible from the battlements. At first he had refused audience to Pietro; upon which the duke, ordering up two armor-smiths, had had the door burst in with sledge-hammers, explaining over the wreckage that he proposed no formal audience such as could be denied for reasons of state, but a friendly call, to reject the which were churlish.

Madness, madness! Yet how the young man thrived on the condition! The red spot I had noticed in his cheeks the day of our descent on Rudolfo had spread until his whole face was rosy; news came to me that he ate like a horse and oft drank two bottles of wine at a meal; also that he smiled for no seeming reason, and at the least excuse would laugh outright.

And, on the day before this of which I write, when a still-room wench had got married to a man-at-arms, the duke had attended—since, he said, it seemed that the captain of the guard was too proud; had kissed the bride, and had said that theirs was a blessed state on which he hoped soon himself to enter!

I learned of this later; it was as well I did not know it then or, being summoned to the duke's cabinet as I was leaving the battlements, certes I should have stared at him longer than was permitted by custom; and certes, with half the council there—as they were when I arrived—this fault would not have passed without rebuke.

"Good morrow, Captain," said Pietro; at which, though it was not said companionly, as he had spoken three months before, all the council winced.

"Thou hast been summoned—" begins the senior grayhound hastily.

Pietro turned on him.

"Will it please thee to permit me to speak for myself?" he demanded. "Am I deaf or dumb? Am I idiotic?"

"N-nay, sire. God forbid!" chatters the secretary.

"Is it thy considered opinion that I am divine, then, and only capable of speaking through oracles?" demands the duke; to which the old man made no answer, such being his opinion, indeed, concerning all dukes but this one.

After which, when the old duke would have continued his advantage and crushed the old fool into a jelly, what doth Pietro do but lay his hand—his own bare hand on the secretary's wrist and make apology.

"I dislike to speak thus to an older than myself," says he reasonably, "but forsooth, signor, thou tryest my patience. This is five times this afternoon that I have had to implore thee for a trifle of liberty. Let me speak for myself, as I choose, and we shall be most excellent friends. Now, Captain, I am told that the duke of Piacenza is dying and that he hath no person near him capable of taking up the government forthwith. That is to say, for a day or so after his death, if he

dieth forthwith, there will be none with authority to declare war, or at least with the strength to make war effectively.

"My council suggest that this would be an excellent time to descend on that province of his which adjoineth my domain and annex the same to this duchy."

"Sire!" gasps the secretary, horrified at this brutal statement of policy. The duke looked at him, and he became too horrified even to speak. All the others sat there, blanched and quaking.

"Thou knowest the province, Captain?" asks Pietro, toying with a pen.

Another councilor bobbed up. I pitied him—an old man who had been doing naught else all his life, and could do naught else now.

"Pardon, sire. With your leave, I have here all the statement—all the figures as to crops and taxes to be raised and—"

"Wilt thou be seated?" roars Pietro, rising himself.

"Sire!" squeaks the aged wretch and obeyed. As for the duke, he held his head for a moment in both hands and stared at the council, meseemed wildly.

"Captain," he went on, after a moment, "this is what I would know. Have the folk of that province, from what thou hast seen of them and from what thou hast been used to hear by thy spies—have they been content under the Duke of Piacenza? My council informeth me that they are unhappy."

They were rather malcontent, emissaries of the old duke having been among them these two years past, stirring them up to a change of allegiance. In fact, they were well used and, since the withdrawal of the said emissaries, had been coming to realize the fact.

But should I contradict the council? Nay, nay.

I therefore said that the council was doubtless better informed than myself, who was a mere soldier; and Pietro once more took his head in his hands.

"Is there not one of you that can hear a plain question and answer it?" he demands. "Is this how states are to be ruled? Before God, I do not wonder that common folk lose patience and revolt. Captain, thou hast called thyself a soldier; then I will ask thee two questions in thine own trade, which if thou dost not answer well, shall prove thee incompetent. First, could this province aforesaid be taken without fighting?"

"Sire—" says I.

"Yea or nay!" roars Pietro.

"Nay, sire."

"And in this fighting," continues the duke, "how many lives would be lost?"

"By us, sire?" I asked, striving for time in face of this enormous question.

"By us and by them too," says Pietro. "Are they not men as we are? Are not their lives the same as ours—and their mothers as ready to weep over the loss of them?"

"If the first attack were a surprize," says I, "not more than four or five hundred, sire."

Pietro stared at me.

"Not more, quotha," says he to himself. "Not more than four or five—"

"There would be attempts to retake the province," says I, anxious to prove my ability, "once rule was reestablished in Piacenza, sire."

"Ah, yes. And how many corpses would'st thou assign to them?"

"Since they might last for years, sire, it is hard to say."

"Two or three thousand, belike?" says Pietro, dandling his pen and smiling at me. "Stint not thyself, Captain. Flesh is cheap."

This pricked me on a tender spot.

"Habitually," says I, in defense of my profession, "it is rather the famines than the sword, sire, which thin the population."

"Thin the population!" echoes Pietro, ceasing to smile and to play with the pen. "Thou just God! Sir Councillor, give me those papers."

"Wh—which, sire?"

"Those lists of desirable things to be stolen with murder," says Pietro, wrenching them out of the poor man's hand and tearing them into shreds. "By the Cross,

gentlemen, there is one thing that stays me from rebuking you, that your gray beards should wag over such proposals; ye are so old and bent in the back that doubtless ye have forgotten youth, if ever ye had it. Ye are so near death now that doubtless ye know not how far from it are the folk ye would kill in this war. But I know; and the girls shall keep their sweethearts, and the mothers their sons, and the Duke of Piacenza his province. This is my decree. The audience is dismissed!"

So there was a state of things; such a state, in my advice, that though not by custom a garrulous man, especially to mine inferiors, I called my lieutenant into consultation that night. And a long face he made of it.

"We had better seek another employ," says he.

"Aye?"

"Why, certes, Captain. His Grace is to have no use of us as an army; and what should he do with a guard, that kisseth the brides of men-at-arms and remitteth the taxes of folk unable to pay?"

"What's this about brides?" I asked; and learned what I have heretofore narrated.

"H'm," says I, at the end. "Well, I would not hasten too much after this new employ, Michele."

"No?"

"No. How long hast thou been in the service of noblemen?"

"Five years," says he, rather puzzled.

"And I nigh to twenty-five. There will be work for us yet, at this rate."

He hesitated, looking doubtful.

"It may be, Captain; but I can not see why—"

"Thou'rt young. For the moment, take care that thy troop keeps better line tomorrow than it did at drill today. The men are lazy, meseems."

"There are six in the cells," says Michele reluctantly.

"Let it be known that the next who hath a spot on his breastplate shall get a month in a dungeon," says I. "And—aye, wait—and fifty lashes. We'll have no brotherly love in this guard."

"No, Captain."

"Dismissed, then," says I.

And to my relief, he had a well enough behaved escort for the Testoni next day. At the same time, I thought it would be a kindly deed—the nobility having been ushered into the castle with due form—to let the troops hear the news from my own lips; so, while they sat their horses in the courtyard, I spoke to them fairly, increasing the punishment promised from one month to two, and throwing in another fifty lashes for the love of God. They were grateful, too; so long was it since they had been addressed in the language they understood.

Then I rode over and, for perhaps an hour, held converse with the captain of the Testoni escort; a good man, though with fantastic ideas of the value of these new pistolets. I had almost convinced him that, though pretty toys for the noblemen, they would never come to be of use for fighting, when we were approached by a lackey who, on the duke's behalf, commanded my instant presence in the council chamber.

The Testoni captain pulled a long face. We had not, of course, discussed politics; but I had gathered from his manner that something was, to his opinion, out of joint.

As I dismounted, he leaned over to me and whispered:

"Luigi! Look you. One word. If there is trouble today, build not on another affair such as that with Rudolfo. We are ready."

I nodded, with a sinking heart, and hastened to the council chamber, asking myself on the way whether things could already be so bad as these last words seemed to portend. Entering, my heart sank farther. Pietro, the Countess Maria and her father alone were present; and if ever I saw three faces portend battle, murder and sudden death, it was then. Pietro looked wild and despairing; the countess was pale with fury, and her father, who was of a portly build, was purple in his rage.

"Bring the Count Rudolfo here," says Pietro, out of breath as if he had been running.

I did so; and, according to custom, placed myself outside the door, ready to escort him when the interview should be over. This is how it cometh to pass that I heard what followed; which I can now narrate to thee, sire, because all that took part in the scene are dead.

First of all, the Count Testoni greeted Rudolfo in due form, and Rudolfo responded; there was the same ceremony, lacking not a compliment, between Rudolfo and Maria; and then Pietro said carelessly—

"Good morrow, cousin.

Upon which old Testoni burst forth.

"I will not have my daughter wed a madman, by ——! As for a madman that insults her, why, were he *not* a madman, I'd—"

"Let me beg Your Excellence to calm himself," says Rudolfo. "In what manner may I be of aid?"

"I desire a witness to the breaking of this betrothal!" roars Testoni. "The duke here hath dismissed all his court, it doth appear, so I am fain to call upon you, sir."

"It is customary," says Rudolfo, "to state reasons."

"Is it not enough reason that he is mad?" shouts the old count. "Is it not of common report that he remits taxes, makes brothers of shaggy-faced guard captains, and kisseth the palace wenches in the public view?"

I heard Pietro push his chair back and rise.

"There is another charge against me," says he wearily. "Being betrothed to the countess, I made pretext to leave her father with these councilors of mine whose ways he doth so admire and to walk with her a little on the battlements. While there, I kissed her."

"As though I had been a milkmaid!" cries Maria.

"I do not kiss milkmaids," says Pietro, "but doubtless the process is the same."

There was a long silence.

"This is grave," says Rudolfo; and there was another silence, which ended in roars of laughter from Pietro.

I was not aware, then, at what he might be laughing; and the opinions I have since formed, being mere speculations, would not interest thee, sire. But laugh he did; so loud and long that when at last Testoni recovered himself enough to speak, he had to bellow louder than before.

"He is lunatic, and he may thank God for it," he yells. "Take notice. The betrothal is broken. It is broken! And if thou say the word, Rudolfo, I'll have my guard carry thee away from here with us."

"Nay, nay—boots not," says Rudolfo—they were near the door by this time, so I could hear him though he spoke low. "I am working for my release through other channels. As Your Excellency knows, these brawls between noblemen are not to be advised."

"M'm," says Testoni, as Pietro's mirth at last died into chuckles. "Well, I go. I shall hope to see thee again—and at liberty—soon, Rudolfo."

"And I," says Maria; and then the door was opened, and father and daughter stalked down the passage, followed by my prayers that my lieutenant would have sense to manage their reception. I could do naught, being occupied with Rudolfo. He was following, when I stepped before him, and seemed so determined to follow that at last, begging his pardon, I had to lay hands on him.

At the sound of which scuffle, Pietro appeared in the door.

"Let him go," says the Duke. "Hither, Rudolfo. I would speak with thee."

They closed the door again.

"I ask thy pardon," says Pietro, "for what violence I worked on thee, and for this detention. It was my belief that thou wast a good man, ill brought up as a straw-stuffed scarecrow, and I coveted thee for a friend. Meseemed we might do great things together, once thou wert alive. Now I see that there is naught in thee but straw, and no room for aught more.

Therefore, thou hast thy liberty, and I beg thee to go."

"Your Highness—" says Rudolfo.

"If thou goest not," roars Pietro suddenly, "I'll box thine ears! Now, scarecrow! Hence!"

So the door opened again and Rudolfo came forth, casting me such a look as he passed that I resolved on the instant never to surrender around those parts. A nobleman's anger is the anger of a man, and passeth; but an offense to his pride is blasphemy, and he will hang for it after twenty years.

"Escort me to my chamber!" he snarled, turning back after ten paces.

"Under favor," says I, "there are no orders so to do. Your Lordship is no longer a prisoner."

And so I stood there, watching Pietro pace the council chamber for nigh on two hours, he meantime unwitting of my presence. The dusk was falling, and my feet were nigh to frozen by the cold flags, when he chanced to look up and see me.

"Ah, Captain!" says he, coming over to the doorway. "What is't?"

"Your Highness did not please to dismiss me," says I.

He said nothing to that, but leaned against the door-post and stared at me as if dreaming.

"I loved her," says he at last, thereby making me start violently, though I was standing at attention. A duke to say such a thing!

He continued to stare at me, his arms folded.

"A machine in steel and whiskers," says he at last, still dreamily. "Art thou not sorry for me, Caradosso?"

A captain of the guard to be sorry for a duke! What was I to say? I opened my mouth several times, but ever closed it again. At last it occurred to me that a salute is ever in place, and saith nothing. So I saluted; which Pietro acknowledged with a shake of his head.

"Alas!" says he, and then, "'Tis well, Captain. Dismissed!"

Thereafter, as if in malicious answer to many a past prayer of mine wherein, being busy, I had desired repose, there fell upon the duchy a complete calm; at least so far as I was concerned, a perfect peace. The ceremonial progresses I had so heartily cursed in the old duke's time were no more. No longer was it necessary to hurry through my dinner to stand like a statue while the duke ate his; the wearisome escorting of noble visitors had ceased with the ceasing of the said noble visits; done with was the detestable business of managing spies and bravos.

Save for the daily inspection and an occasional round of sentries, I had nothing to do beyond what I chose; and so of course I was most miserable. After a month, I was even moved to abandon the much better wine which had been issued to us since Pietro came to the throne, and to wander into the town, seeking some red, sour stuff that should remind me of the good old days.

Man is a strange animal; and fate is stranger still. Why was it that among all the pot-shops in the town I should have turned into that remote and most ignoble tavern which had been bought, on his dismissal, by one of the duke's bravos—the younger of them; his name escapes me. He had more custom than I should have expected at such an hour. Meseemed there were folk around the barrels who should have been on their wains, or in their stone-quarries or what-not.

And he was glad to see me. He took me out into the garden at the rear and, without that I must explain my desires to him, confronted me with a stoup of the very worst Chianti.

"I was about to ask audience of the Captain at the castle," he says, smiling as I buried my face in the pot. "'Tis time the guard should be tiring of Falernian, or whatever 'tis they give them nowadays; and I was to ask the Captain's interest in sending 'em—"

"How the —— dost thou know they're tiring?" I demanded.

"One can not kill many men without coming to notice how they act when

alive," says the rascal. "Besides, there are rumors. Men talk. Tavern-keepers hear."

How that vinegar had warmed the cockles of my heart! I felt gently sad; lonely, like the duke. The fellow refilled my pot.

"It is half a year," says I, "since I have known any news of the duchy."

"It will not be another half-year," says the man.

"How so?"

He got up and, yawning, closed the door that led into the barrel-room. Also, he lowered his voice and appeared to be showing me a bunch of fine grapes.

"Does the castle know nothing of what's toward in the provinces?" he asked.

"The castle may," says I. "Certes the Captain doth not."

The man put down the grapes and looked at me strangely.

"Well?" I demanded. "What is't?"

He sat down, and made gestures as if he discoursed on the excellence of my wine.

"If it concerned the townspeople, I would say naught," he muttered, "but it shall not profit me to have half the country bumpkins in Italy rioting here and knocking the heads out of my casks to aid their ardor. Hearkee, Captain. There is revolt toward; partly from cause given, and partly raised by the Count Rudolfo and the Count di Testoni."

I saw in a flash the meaning of that alliance for such work. Rudolfo, could he unseat his cousin, would wed Maria; and two great domains would be one.

"And the cause given?" I asked.

"Why, at first it was the remission of taxes to the villages that had their crops spoiled. All the other villages are crying at the injustice. They've had their crops spoiled in the past, and never a denier off the bill for that."

"And in the future?" says I.

"The future is yet to come. I tell thee, Captain, though that the revolt will come before it. It hath been much hastened by the duke's latest foolishness—this plan of taking a bright lad from each village and having him taught to read and write; aye, sending him to Padua or some such place to learn more when he is grown up."

My hair stood on end. To rob a peasant father of a lad for his plough-tail, with intent to give him back a surgeon or the like!

"It is now said, and much believed," went on the tavern-keeper, "that His Grace is some kind of infidel, and wisheth to raise Christian boys in—God forbid it!—Saracen ways and mysteries. There are some that say worse; but— At all events, Captain, what they believe is no matter. So that they do believe it, they will act on it; and that action—"

"Man," says I, having nó money wherewith to pay information, "thou ravest. Nonsense! The duke is much beloved."

"How can that be?" asks the fellow, rising as I prepared to go. "Hath he not been trying continually to better the condition of the people?"

"Nonsense," says I, not well understanding what this meant. "Here, take thy money. Dost thou dare offer me drink for nothing?"

"Would the Captain use at least his—would he speak a word to the men concerning—?"

"Am I a drink-shop tout?" I roared. "Hence, scum! Open the door for me."

The which he did, bowing low and following me to the street with more bows and apologies. I left him without further words beyond a stern caution to beware what he said and to whom, and forthwith hastened to report what I had heard to the duke. Formerly, I would not have made high report without confirmation by several spies; but now, in the first place, I had no spies; and in the second place, I did woundily believe in the truth of this rumor. As the bravo had said, one can not kill many men without coming at the knowledge of how they act in the live state. And after the conversation, I felt insurrection in the air.

His Grace was alone in his cabinet; he heard my tale with bewilderment.

"What is this?" he asked. "Tell me again—from the beginning."

I did so, and noticed that he sniffed continuously the while. At last he arose and stood face to face with me.

"Captain," says he gravely, "this is a dream born of that wine."

"Sire—" says I.

"Then again, the sun is hot; and by thine own account thou hast walked far in the full heat of the day. It was not wise, Caradosso."

"But, sire—"

"Well?"

"Sire, if I could but reengage two or three spies—there are half a dozen still in the town—then we should know the truth; we could prepare."

"But I know the truth already," says Pietro. "I have not been out in the sun, good Captain. When all my rule is to be open and fair, and the country folk are coming to know it by so many evidences, shall I spoil all by sending spies among them? That would indeed incite to a revolt. Hearken, Captain. Thou hast been debauched by too much association with princes.

"Thou art convinced that all mankind is perverse as they are trained to be. Thou hast seen so many of thy betters return ingratitude for benefits, hate for love and love for threats, that thou art convinced that this is the way of the world. That it is not, my good Captain, save after long and arduous education, such as the commonalty hath not had. The common man hates his oppressor and loves his benefactor and doth all following. In short, he is a human being, such as I understand, being one myself."

I dared say no more because, had we come to details, he might have ordered me to dismount the guns from the walls and to disband the guard altogether. As is safest in such cases, I saluted.

"It would be well for thee to lie down," says Pietro, smiling in his conviction that I was drunk. And he turned back to his writing table.

A moment later, he looked up.

"Can'st thou not walk?" he demanded.

"His Grace did not please to dismiss me," says I.

"In the name of ——, did'st think I expected thee to sleep on my floor?" shouts the duke, flying into such a rage as he had shown at the council. "Dismissed! Dismissed! Dismissed!"

And that was the last I saw of him until, reports from provincial tax-gatherers having been disregarded or met with ducal urgings of less sternness toward the populace, the revolution came suddenly to a head, and a mob of some five thousand from the districts to the south of Venieto marched headlong on the capital. They were within a league before I heard of them, and within a mile before—the troop getting to horse slowly, and as if out of sympathy with what we were to do—I could come face to face with the mob, my guard behind me.

"What is all this?" I asked, when two or three of the leading rioters had been slain as an earnest.

It was a risk that, long unaccustomed to discipline as they had been, their comrades would rush us; in which case, sire, I should not now have the writers' cramp. But by good luck, there were those present who recognized me—perhaps I had hanged relatives of theirs, or the like of that; and so we parleyed reasonably. At least I did; and they followed the example as well as a mob may. Two of their spokesmen were priests.

"But what," says I, "is the petition?"

"It is no petition," says one priest. "It is a demand. We will not have Antichrist to rule over us!"

"Meaning the duke?" says I; but received no answer. The word "Antichrist" had been caught up and flung backward across the crowd, which now roared it in all its voices; and, what was worse, surged forward half a pace. So that I was fain to snatch up a lay spokesman by the hair of his head and lay him across my saddle-bow, promising at the least accident to butcher him like a sheep.

"We have no quarrel with thee, Captain," said some dozens of voices at this.

"It is as well for you," I told them.

"Then it is your modest request that His Highness the Duke—whom God protect—should abdicate. Uncover at His Grace's name, ye bumpkins!"

Since most of them had no hats, this was difficult to be done; but seeing one fellow in an old brass helmet, got God knows where, I spurred my horse into the crowd and knocked it off his head with the flat of my sword. After the which, argumentation was much easier, though not very profitable.

The mob was not to be persuaded to turn back; even by my assurance—true, as it chanced, to the best of my knowledge—that the duke was not in the castle. He had gone north that very morning, with but two men as an escort, to see for himself what brutality of his underlings had resulted in the burning of a tax-barn. That aught but over-harshness could produce such doings, he firmly refused to believe.

"We will await his return then," says one of the priests.

"In the square before the castle," says the other.

And so, after another half-hour and some few deaths, it came to pass; on condition that the ragged column moved escorted by my troop, and with the clear understanding that any rioting would be fatal (It would have been—to us). Thus we arrived at the great square; and the mob saw Pietro, unexpectedly returned, standing on a battlement above the main gate.

How glad then was I that, before leaving, I had posted forty men and six guns before that portal! And how glad was I that the mob had no real leaders! For, considering that I had lied to them concerning the duke's absence, their mood was one which would have torn us to pieces; whereas, by a quick evolution, we were able to form up under cover of the cannon, with the loss of no more than three men.

"What is this, Captain?" calls Pietro to me. He seemed very pale, but not in the least afraid.

"Antichrist!" roared the mob; and other things as well—about the stealing of their children, mostly. By no roaring could I have made myself heard, so I merely sat my horse and saluted.

Pietro beckoned me to him; and, while I struggled with the problem of whether to disboey an order for the first time in my life, or whether to obey and let the crowd overwhelm us forthwith, one of the priests touched my boot.

"Go to him, Captain," says he. "We will come with thee. Perchance he may accede, and save bloodshed."

"Who shall keep thy crowd from shedding its own blood, while ye are gone?" says I. "Besides, why should His Grace receive rebels?"

The roaring of the mob had died a little; Pietro called to me.

"Are those spokesmen of the people, Caradosso?"

Saluting again, I responded that they were.

"Bring them to me," says the duke.

At which awful roarings began again; roarings not appeased until one of the priests, standing on a gun, assured the crowd that he was to be brought within the castle for a conference, and not for a hanging, as they had very naturally supposed.

The postern gate was opened. My lieutenant took command and, pursued by rumblings from the square, we entered.

Pietro, instead of waiting in some place difficult of access, had descended to the courtyard, where he met us with a pleasant "Good morrow, reverend sirs."

"Bow!" says I, driving a steel glove into each of their backs, and they had bowed before Pietro could command me to begone.

"Under favor, sire, if I reappear without the reverend gentlemen, the mob will consider them murdered."

"Stand out of earshot, then," says the duke sternly. "I demand your pardon, sirs, for my captain's act."

As I have said, it was but a moment since they had both bowed—and low; now they stood up straighter than ever;

and, retreating, I heard one of them commence—

"Thou hast more for which to demand pardon, sire, than this; and to demand it of God, not of His humble servants."

And so, with as little sign of deference or respect as they might have shown to a dishonest servant, those twain began their list of complaints. One of them, at the end of a period, raised his finger and pointed it in Pietro's face! The other, at the end of the exposition of their griefs, raised both his arms to the sky, evidently calling down the wrath of Heaven by the tubful. I gained some pleasure by thinking what fate would have been theirs in old Guglielmo's time. But in old Guglielmo's time all this would never have happened.

Pietro was biting his nails and considering.

"I must have time," says he. I heard him, having approached with the idea that, speech having stopped, one of the speakers might say "Amen!" with a knife. He seemed unaware of my presence.

"We will give thee a quarter of an hour," says the elder priest. "Longer we can not hold the people."

"There are others that might," says I in a low voice; and they both started, looked at me and assumed more respectful expressions.

"It will suffice," says Pietro; and, without taking leave of him, the priests withdrew. Being dismissed by an abstracted nod of the duke's head, I went too, to find the mob silent but surging, and my lieutenant half-wild with indecision as to whether he should fire or no.

The priest mounted a gun, and spoke. The surging stopped. At the end, the mob gave a roar of approval—and of menace—against the case that their demand should not be met; and then we settled for the wait. There was a clock on the church at the other side of the square; never did I see hands move so slowly.

The first third of the time went well enough because, halted, the crowd had time to examine us at leisure, and to comprehend the meaning of our drawn swords, lowered lances and trained guns. Its demeanor became so satisfactory that almost I had hopes; but the next five minutes dashed them to the ground. Having feared death, each man in the crowd now felt shame lest his neighbor—whose knees had also shaken—should suspect this cowardice; and accordingly they began to howl for instant battle.

And the last third of that time of grace was by far and far the worst. The crowd, fearful that its imitation courage might escape it once more and forever, was raging as never have I seen a crowd rage before or since. Twice it surged up to the very lance-points, and was controlled, not at all by its leaders but by those who would have been impaled the first. Well I knew that the third surge—due, I judged, just at the end of the quarter hour—would be the last.

It was beginning—I had opened my mouth for the order that the gunners should fire—when the postern behind me opened and a servant came forth, white-faced.

"Captain!" he babbled by my right boot.

"Yes?" I kept my eyes on the crowd, of course. "If there are orders, speak quickly."

"The duke bids you, on your allegiance, not to fire until he gives the word."

"Tell His Grace that we can not manage this lot with cold steel," says I. "And tell him quickly!"

"It is the duke's command that nothing be done without his order by word of mouth," says the lackey. "Oh, Holy Virgin! I shall be killed! Reverend fathers in God, be my witnesses that I am a poor man; I have but earned my living—"

He ceased, receiving the hilt of my sword on the side of his head.

"Tell the duke I must have token for this," I roared at him, for the noise of the crowd was deafening. One of the priests was on his gun again, haranguing the mob; I wondered what he would think if it were fired while yet he spoke.

"He sent this ring," gasps the wretch. "Oh, Philogone, my patron saint, intercede for me! Can I go, Captain?"

But he was already gone, leaving me with sufficient token indeed—a great amethyst which alone the duke had worn as jewel. I stared at it and pondered his lunatic command until, with the tail of my eye, I observed the priest who was not orating, staring at me sidelong with a smile.

"Wilt thou obey orders, Sir Soldier?" says he.

"Mind thine own business and I'll mind mine," I told him. Whereupon he commenced to bite his nails. He was considering—much more dangerous man than his companion was he. And when he did speak—as now he did, pulling the other off the gun most cavalierly—much more respected.

"My children!" he shouted. "The day is ours! The guard hath its orders not to fire!"

A wild roar went up at this. I saw my lieutenant look at me piteously, and the men of the troop to eye me with hope.

"Therefore, onward!" yells the priest. "Into the castle! And, since the guard is not to harm you, harm it not! Pass it by on the other side! Onward! Onward!"

Poor Michele could stand it no longer; he moved his horse up to mine. There were tears in his eyes; he forgot to salute before speaking, and he called upon devils unknown even to me.

"Onward! Onward!" thunders the crowd, and seethed before surging.

"Are these bumpkins to pass us?" moans Michele. "Is it for this that I have sweated with this guard? Luigi, in the name of the Trinity, shall I order the lances raised?"

To cover his emotion I gave the order myself; and, seeing the bright points flash in the air, the mob roared once more. A little hunchbacked man ducked between two horses. A red-headed fellow in a ragged shirt followed him. Then four or five louts at once; then a dozen.

"Dout matches!" I shouted to the gunners.

They dropped them to earth and stamped on them, and instantly were an island in a rushing tide of rustics. The postern was open; another moment, and the great gates swung back.

"I shall awake soon," says Michele.

"Sit to attention while thou'rt asleep," says I; and we did so, side by side like statues.

In truth, the scene resembled very much to a nightmare, especially when, the guard still ahorse and in order in the now empty square, towsled heads began to appear from windows of the castle and hoarse voices with country accents to shout greetings from floor to floor. It came to my mind, but vaguely, that the duke might have some mad plan of closing the gates again and, with us to guard them, shutting up the revolution whole in the castle; so I withdrew the troop a distance and turned it to face the entrance.

It was as well I did, because now pillage had begun, and all manner of things were raining from above—great carved chairs that smashed on the cobblestones, suits of velvet, silver pots and candlesticks, pictures; everything that would be most out of place in the cabins of the stealers.

But no order came; no order. We sat there and watched, and the sweat that had broken out on me dried; and the men began to ease their gorgets and to chat out of the corners of their mouths, and even to chuckle among themselves. Still nothing happened. Now plunderers, mostly with bottles of wine, came forth to stroll in the square and to mock at us; which was natural, though very hard to bear. And at last, forth comes one of the priests, looking puzzled.

"Then the duke hath sought safety in flight?" says he.

I gave no answer.

"He is not in the castle," says the priest, biting his nails again and squinting at me. "Assuredly he is not in the castle."

I was silent; so was the troop; so was the surrounding mob, as it crowded about and listened. So it was that, as at a great distance, I heard the clatter of hoofs—

a flying squadron of horse, as I judged; well trained, too.

Some seconds later, the bumpkins heard it. A minute after that they began to yell an alarm, and to scutter for safety; and within a hundred heart-beats—every one of which I felt—there thundered into the square an armed force.

Twisting in my saddle to survey it, while shouting the command for the troop to about-face once more, I stared at its colors with the desperation of a last hope.

There were Testoni pennants, and a banner, well to the rear, of the Carpacci di Ravenna; but the leading troop was the Count Rudolfo's guard, and at its head, in full armor, rode the Count Rudolfo himself.

After a month. On the road to Siena.

SIRE, I must hasten with what remains to be told. If I am a judge, the war to which we are hastening will be a bad affair, and I shall need all my wits for my business. Further, I may be killed; in which case I shall write no more, and may God forgive me for the writing of this. True, I promised thy father; but why did I so? As well be held by an oath to give some infant a dagger for a plaything. Yet I can not let all this labor, once performed, go for nothing; and besides, did not that priest at Venieto tell me that the Lord arranged all things to his will, no matter what the efforts of mankind?

He said this about the hanging of two hundred of his flock by Rudolfo, the new Duke of Veniet. I do not know whether he changed his mind when Rudolfo, having at first overlooked him as a leader, at last had him both unfrocked and hanged. By that time I was in the service of that well established count mentioned in my beginning—a merry man of eighty, who sent for me at first to learn the true story of the revolution and of Pietro's vanishment; and who discovered by accident that I was a good soldier.

For I would expound, sire, that the fate of Pietro was a mystery of which all Italy talked—and talks still, none knowing the truth save myself; and now thee. He, Duke of Venieto, Count of This and Overlord of That, had vanished into thin air. Since, following his talk with me and the two priests, he had entered his bedchamber to reflect—a servant told us that—no mortal eye had seen him; and though spies went hither and yon, and every court of which he might seek alliance was watched, never did trace of him appear.

After a year, Rudolfo had established himself so firmly by the cruelty of his rule that an angel from Heaven could not have unseated him; and the rigor of the search waned. Still, everywhere, over the fourth or fifth bottle, men would wonder and guess as to Pietro's fate—and, as I have said, they still do so. He must, it hath long been concluded, have been slain; but in that case, by whom, and where, and what was done with his corpse?

SIRE, some three years after I had taken service with the old count, it became necessary that his son should visit a certain distant lordship for the arranging of a marriage. The lad was but ten years old, and the count was as proud of him as his age entitled him to be; so that the cortége, whereof I commanded the escort, was of more than usual magnificence. And our route lay through the Romagna, and at a certain mean village in the Romagna we halted, my young lord being of very weak body and unable to bear long journeys without repose.

I will be brief with you, sire, because we march—I mean from here, whence I write—in an hour. After that the tents had been pitched, the camp made and the guard set, I placed my lieutenant in command and went for a stroll in the village—actually to see whether there might not be a bed under a roof whereon to repose my poor old bones.

But there was not, for it was a very mean village indeed; and I was returning to camp when of a sudden I heard the most melodious voice of a man upraised in song to the accompaniment of a guitar.

From time to time a woman's voice would join for a line or two; I gathered from her sudden starts and stops that the good wife was getting the evening meal and singing when she had time from her pots and pans; also from her children, of whom one, having climbed up a grape-arbor, now fell to the ground and began to bawl.

Instanter, the song stopped, and the singer, guitar still in hand, came rushing forth to the brat's assistance. I also went over toward it, because I am fond of brats.

"Tut-tut!" says the father, beating dust from the child's one garment—and that was ragged. "Naught broken, Bianca! Hear the pretty music! Hush, child! Look at the soldier! What will he think of thee?"

"Naught bad," says I, squatting in the dust. "Now, come, Bianca! Is this bravery? C—"

With which I ceased, for I had glanced at the face of the father, smiling; and he had smiled at me, with a most strange twinkle in his eyes; and of a sudden my hair bristled and my mouth grew dry; and then, after all these signs there burst upon me the knowledge that I was squatting in the dust with Pietro, Duke of Venieto, Count of This and Overlord of That!

Of course I got to my feet and made as if to do something—God knoweth what—with my cap; but, leaving the child to yell, Pietro seized my arm.

"Betray me not, fool!" he whispered; and then went on in a tone that could be heard. "Faint, Captain? This hot sun—at the Captain's age— If Your Honor would accept a cup of wine—it is the best to be had hereabouts, for I grow it myself."

All this in a country accent hardly understandable, and all accompanied by a gentle dragging of me toward his cottage, in the door whereof stood a woman, a great, full-bosomed country mare with black hair and a brown face and red cheeks, and two more children about her, whereof one was at her skirts.

"Wine, Maria," says Pietro. "Nay, I'll get it. Do thou dust a seat for the captain."

She cleaned a bench under the grape-arbor—not that it, nor anything about the house, needed more cleaning than already it had; and then she stood by, hands on hips, staring at me as at a puppet-show. Bianca, still howling, came in and likewise stood transfixed, finger in mouth; while the other visible child, being younger, took leave to finger the hilt of my dagger. She had been eating grapes, that one; she was grape-juice down to the navel.

"Francesca!" cries her mother of a sudden. "How darest thou touch HIS Honor! Pardon, sir. Pray be merciful; the child is very young."

Her sudden exclamation had aroused me. Now, blinking like an owl, I perceived Pietro returning, with a *fiasco* in one hand and a wooden mug in the other, and scowling at me to say, "Do not rise." I doubt if my legs would have supported me had I tried it: even after the second of the stoups which, without seating himself, he poured me out.

"Andrea!" cried his wife. "Art thou to drink at the same time as the captain? For shame!"

He laughed, and ceased to pour the wine designed for himself.

"His Honor will forgive me. Maria, the supper will burn."

Which so distressed her that she fled incontinent; only returning five minutes later to beg my pardon for going without my leave.

"Well, Captain?" says Pietro, whose very name was now Andrea, staring down at me and twinkling. "Thou findest me somewhat changed? Before thou repliest, I will implore thee to refrain from highnesses and suchlike. I have much respect in this village, because I grow the best wine and can play upon the guitar. Also, I tell stories in the evenings. A whisper of what thou knowest would ruin me."

"Much changed," I stammered, nodding my head.

And indeed he was. His face was continually on the smile and his eyes on the twinkle; he was an ell across the chest, and his bare arms, almost black with the sunburn, were muscled like a blacksmith's. As for his clothes, they might have fetched two whites as rags to keep the birds off.

"Aye," says he, pouring out more wine, "and look at those children! Girls—but compare them with thy charge over there in the camp! Ho-ho-ho!"

His laughter shook the very ground; his wife, fearing some disrespect, put an anxious face out of the doorway.

"Give me that bread, Maria," says he, taking a great chunk out of her hand. "I am starving."

And—having received my permission, which he awaited with solemnity—he ate the manchet in three gulps, dipping the last of it in his wine and saying, "God be praised!"

"I was ever a vulgar fellow," he grinned, picking up two or three fallen crumbs from the table and eating them also, "and now I am acting according to my nature. How do I pity those who, like unto me, must yet do what irks them. And how much more those wretches who are so perverse as to believe themselves happy in so doing!

"How might the gods have laughed at me if, that day three years ago, I had let thee fire on the crowd; sacrifice their lives and the lives of all thy troop, that I might be maintained in yon state which I detested! If I had put murder on my soul—to avoid this bliss I have now! Ho-ho-ho!"

Then he told me, over another *fiasco*, of how he had come to that place. Long he had had in his rooms at the castle, hidden from the knowledge of all, the disguise of a country man; he had planned, it seemed, to go forth among his people unknown, as some Eastern prince or other had done. With this disguise, and in the confusion, he had escaped by a secret way known only to himself. He had wandered afoot for eleven days, chopping wood and suchlike for his meals, and even begging when there was need; he had come to Tassi, and at last wed the daughter of that cultivator whose hireling he had been.

"And mark you," says the duke in most boastful wise, "this was none of your wenches that marry because they have nothing better to do, or for lands, or money, or the like of that. Her father beat her with a whip for preferring me to a landowner's son; and two of her suitors tried to stab me, but I was too quick for them. Ho-ho! And now I own six hundred and twenty several vine-plants *and* a press, and I will have six fowls to lay eggs next year, please God."

He put his brown hands on his ragged knees and surveyed me mockingly.

"Doubtless thou thinkest, Captain," says he, "that thy state is much better than mine."

Alas, he had read my thoughts; for in fact, I was reflecting that, full of honor and encased in gold inlay as I was, I had neither wife, nor child, nor vines, nor fowls; that the honor I had got out of the services of princes was an empty, inedible and undrinkable thing; and that mine armor was little better than a dress to be killed in.

"The supper is ready," says Maria from the doorway.

And when her husband and I made no answer, being absorbed in the contemplation each of the other, she went away; to return a minute later and fidget with her feet after the manner of housewives, divided between respect for me and a reverence for good food.

"I come—I come," says Andrea at last; then in a low voice, "I can not ask thee to dinner, Caprain. There's not enough for three."

So I arose, and he gripped me by the wrist.

"Softly a moment," says the duke. "Luigi, I would beg of thee two promises. First—never to say that thou hast seen me."

"Never," says I, well aware how quickly he would be murdered on the word.

"Nay, I knew that," says he, "and I was in two minds whether or no to declare myself to thee—it would have saved even so much risk. But, this next to be born shall be a son, please God. I can not call him Pietro, and I will not call him Andrea, which is the name I bear here; therefore he shall be known as Giovanni, seest thou?"

"Aye, aye, Your—"

"Ssh! And when thou goest, beware not to thank me for the wine. Say thou'lt recommend me to some other captain, or thy lord or some one. Well, Luigi, as to this son of mine! I design that he shall inherit my vines and my fowls and my wine-press and the tenancy of my land, and be happy therein. But I mistrust his blood; I lie awake at nights and picture him trying to ascend the heights from which I am so comfortably descended.

"When I have nightmares I even see him a soldier, and then a captain, and then a freelance—it hath been done before; and finally, a dunghill nobleman somewhere, keeping up his state by scowling. And this is my prayer of thee: In this village I can not be known to write, and all that I do is known. Therefore, write thou—the story of all this; if thou livest so long, that the lad may have it when he shall be eighteen, he can not take much to ill ways before that."

"I am not handy with the pen," says I, not then foreseeing how, during an imprisonment, I should take to writing *novelle*.

"The dinner, Andrea!" says Maria's voice in agony. "It groweth cold! The captain will pardon. Food is so dear!"

"Well, thou'st heard my wish," says Pietro, bowing to me and seeming to excuse himself. "Thy duties were not too heavy when thou wast under my command. I am more likely to live eighteen years than thou art, and thus to discharge my trust myself. But two lives are better than one, and thine is the only other I can command in this affair. Only promise that if it is possible—"

For some reason, tears came suddenly to my eyes.

"In the name of God," says Pietro shakily, "go away! But first say 'Aye.'"

"Aye."

"Then good-by, Your Honor," says Andrea. "Pleasant voyage to Your Honor! Long life to the young Prince! Happy reign and great prosperity—"

Maria joined with amens and more blessings, and they bowed me out. Halfway up the street I found myself halted and staring at Bianca, playing in the dust while her mother called her.

And I stumbled forward through the dusk, toward the camp and the duty of guarding the young lord—he died within six weeks of then, by the way; the physicians said he lacked the strength to live.

Then I thought—as I thought again at the death of Rudolfo from the wasting disease five years later—of Pietro's fat brown children; of whom, if indeed born a boy, Your Grace is the eldest male.

The messenger is waiting—a man whom I can ill spare. Also, the company is ahorse, and I can write no more.

Thou hast a goodly heritage.

—L. Caradosso, Captain.

THREE ENDORSEMENTS

I

THIS document was found on the person of one answering to the name of Giovanni, and apparently a rustic from a far part. Arrested in the attempt to enter the city of Venieto by night, the gates being then closed, by climbing the wall, in defiance of His Highness' edict.

Respectfully submitted, in kissing the hands of His Highness' council.

—Tuozzolo, Officer of the Watch

II

To be hanged.

—Battista, Vntii Dux.

III

Executed in my presence.

—Martello, Captain.

The Camp-Fire

A free-to-all Meeting-Place *for Readers, Writers and Adventurers*

LEONARD NASON tells about the topography of his novelette in this issue. How many of the rest of you have gone back and visited the places where you once fought? And how did they look?

Biarritz, France.

The Tranchee de Calonne along which the Swede made his approach march to Hattonchattel was not a trench, as a great many people believe, but was a road constructed in the 18th century, by M. de Calonne, minister of finance under Louis the Sixteenth. The road led from Haudainville to the shooting lodge of the minister, the ruins of which soldiers familiar with the sector will remember as the last house on the nose of the cliff at Hattonchattel.

In August, 1925, almost seven years after the evacuation of this sector by the Germans, the straw in which they slept in the cellars of this hunting lodge was still thick on the floor, although black and rotting. The summer house, in the woods just below the lodge, is still standing.

The Tranchee is now a lonely abandoned road, with grass growing thickly between the ruts. It runs through the woods until it gets into the dead country about Les Eparges, where the trees have all been killed by shell-fire, and after traversing this, goes into the woods again near Saint Remy, the old German front line. The tranchee is crisscrossed by filled-in trenches, and in the woods on either side one can see the ruins of stables, dugouts, engineer dumps, trenches, hospitals, and the old embankments of narrow gauge railways.

I got a much better look at the country about Hattonchattel the second time I was there, and it looks somewhat differently than it did to the Swede. However, the writer, like the Swede, was there when the place was supposed to be full of boche, and his impression of the surrounding scenery was very vague. The railroad station for the three towns, Hattonchattel, Hattonville, and Vigneulles is at Vigneulles, at the foot of the hill on the right, but since the three towns are all within a stone's throw of one another, it is not surprizing that the cavalry were somewhat confused as to its location. The capture of the station was of no importance to them anyway, since Vigneulles had been occupied by two divisions of infantry since daybreak.—LEONARD NASON.

WHO CAN tell this comrade about the stone fish? He doesn't sound like a very jolly little playmate.

California Inn
W. C. farm
Davis, Calif.

Being a new member of Camp-Fire I suppose I should sit back away from the glare and listen to the wisdom of the old-timers. Well, I'm perfectly willing to do that. But I'd like to ask some of the tropical sailors and exbeachcombers if they have ever heard of a stone fish? This "beastie" is supposed to be about a foot in length and has a stinger near the tail, not on the tail, like the sting ray, but between the dorsal fin and the tail. Its sting is supposed to cause excruciating pain and in some cases paralysis of the part of the body stung by it. Now I've never seen it, but have heard many yarns about it. It is supposed to be found around Thursday Island, also at Pitcairn and in most of the South Seas. Any information about it will be gladly received.—LOUIS SHEPPARD.

ARTHUR O. FRIEL, like Leonard Nason, has something to say about the country in which his story in this issue is laid. Rather rough neighborhoods, both, at times, it would seem.

New York City.

The Devil's Castle itself is not altogether imaginative. There is a weird tall-towered rock in that section of the Orinoco, several miles inland, which corresponds to the shape of the fictional Castillo del Diablo; and there's a caño leading toward it; and the two are above the huge domes (also real) which I call the Tetas. And there is another rock in the immediate vicinity on which,

legend declares, still rest gold and gems left by conquistadores. Men have killed themselves trying to climb to this legendary (and, I believe, wholly mythical) treasure. Not wishing to start any more adventurers on the road to death, I'm not writing any Camp-Fire note about it. But there it is, or ain't, and so I've just changed its location to El Castillo and sent *Jule* and *Rafe* to try for it. There is also a place in the same general region which growls at certain stages of water; the natives call it the Mouth of Hell, and keep away from it. So that's not invented, either—just moved, like the loot to the Castillo.—ARTHUR O. FRIEL.

AGAIN the question, "What is adventure?" Or, rather, "Is there really any such thing as adventure?" This comrade thinks there is, and tells why.

Worcester, Mass.

Here I was enjoying a quiet siesta on the outer edge of our Camp-Fire circle when all of a sudden a smoke talk from Mister W. E. Dowser wakes me up, prompts me to rear up on my hind legs and bust out. I feel like a school boy telling his instructor that he doesn't know what he is talking about, and maybe it is because I am just a few years removed from that age that I can't, or at least I don't want to agree with half of what Mr. Dowser says. Maybe when I am his age I'll be able to agree with him.

I'll grant that there are about a thousand and one definitions for "adventure" but I simply will not admit that there is no such thing. I can't define it myself but here is what adventure is to me: anything that makes the day a little out of the ordinary, which makes it worth remembering, and which sends you to bed at night with the feeling that the world is a pretty good old place after all. By which you will judge that I am easily satisfied perhaps but when you grow to look for that little thing each day, how much finer the days are and how much more cheerful an outlook on life you can acquire. I found my creed expressed very beautifully in a poem once. It is by Grace Noll Crowell.

"The day will bring some lovely thing,"
I say it over each new dawn:
"Some gay, adventurous thing to hold
Against my heart when it is gone."
And so I rise and go to meet
The day with wings upon my feet.

And the third verse:

No day has ever failed me quite—
Before the grayest day is done,
I come upon some misty bloom
Or a late line of crimson sun.
Each night I pause—remembering
Some gay, adventurous, lovely thing.

Now believe me, brothers, old and young, there is about the best cure for blues or shall I say the best insurance against blues that I ever heard of. And you'll find plenty of those lovely things too if you once start looking for them.

So much for adventures. I find them every day, not hair raising ones to be sure, but unforgettable for all that.

As for ambitions, and I believe the word should always be used in the plural, what in heck fun is there in life without them. Maybe you start out with a little one and when that is realized there is another one ahead of you just a bit bigger and you never quite realize the fullfillment of the last once. Gosh, can you imagine what a rotten feeling it would be to attain your ambitions in totem before you passed out of the scene. Just what is going to make life enjoyable after that last ambition has been realized.

Sure I've had several of them already. About the first one I remember having was to be at the top in my particular troop of Boy Scouts. And I climbed up from a tenderfoot to Assistant Scoutmaster before I was of the age where As. S. M.'s commissions are given out, so I had to get a special dispensation from headquarters to receive my commission. Next I wanted to go to college. And I went too only I had to work my way through. I wanted to own a car and I realized that ambition, only to be broke all the time ever since. About the time I started high school I busted out with an ambition big enough to last me through life, but it wasn't until ten years later that I managed to get a foot on the bottom rung of the ladder. A couple weeks ago I grabbed the second rung and I know that this particular ladder is long enough so that I never will get to the top.

Well, suppose I say to myself, as Mr. Dowser would intimate is true, and I agree that far, "The higher I go the more knocks I'm in for. Guess I better stay right here where it is easy to hold on." Time for the wooden overcoat then. What good is tomorrow if I can't hope that it will bring me a bit nearer the top. Count the cost? Sure. But if we get what we really want, isn't it worth paying for? And paying any price so long as what we pay for is decent?

This subject is too much for a letter anyway. Maybe I'm happily constituted in that I don't have to depend on any one else for my pleasures. The old acquaintances may have their sort of fun and the new acquaintances can have their idea of a good time, and if I find I don't care for either one why I can get me a fishpole and a quarter line with a few worms, park my dirty trousers on the seat of a boat somewhere, light up the old pipe and have a whale of a time all by myself. Or roam around the hills up in Vermont with a good horse under the saddle. And so forth and so on to the end.

I wonder if Mr. Dowser hasn't been just ruminating like I used to do right after I got out of college. I'd ask myself whether the four years had been worth while and one day I'd answer myself "No," and the next day the answer would be "Yes." The first year the "Nos" had it but after that they began

to speak with the minority and now they are never heard.

So go ahead and ruminate all you want to, Brother Dowser, but for cat's sake don't try to grab away any idea us youngsters may have as to ambitions being worth while.—W. EARL PADDOCK.

HOW MANY words in the Eskimo language? Something said in A. A. has developed a debate. It may not matter, although Siwash has always seemed to me to have some mighty useful words. But then Siwash is Indian, isn't it? Just where do the Indians leave off and the Eskimos begin? Sometimes I'd like to know a few more Siwash words for use around the office—but that has nothing to do with the debate.

I feel hurt and indignant over a remark I saw something like a year ago in a copy of *Adventure*, concerning the Eskimo. It was published in answer to a query. Your trouble-shooter stated that the Eskimo language consist of a few hundred words only. This statement (with all due respect) seems more than a little inaccurate and piffling.

Two books exist which will give the reader another idea of the Eskimo language, altogether. One is *A Bibliography of the Esquimauan Languages*, by James Pilling. The other is a sketch of Eskimo grammar by Thalbitzer, in the *Handbook of American Indian Languages*. Both were published by the Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology. The Eskimo language is, as a matter of fact, fully as complex as Russian is.

Whether your critic knows more than two hundred words of Eskimo or not, his wits ought to tell him that the Eskimo know more than that. Their language contains hundreds of words for the various parts of the sledge and the dog-harness, to say nothing of the various parts of the dog. Any half-witted Eskimo can name, also, the parts and appurtenances of the skin boat or kayak, and there are thousands of them. Take an Eskimo into a museum and see if he hesitates over this matter.

The Eskimo's vocabulary contains easily twenty or twenty-five thousand words. Your statement, speaking briefly, makes me tired. The Eskimo knows more than five hundred cuss words—T. T. WATERMAN.

AFTER remarking that the Eskimo does not—observably—cuss, Mr. Solomons, of A. A., goes on to defend himself. And you must admit that twenty-five thousand is a lot of words.

I've forgotten what the answer of mine was, but I may well have said that the Eskimos I knew had a pretty slim vocabulary. You say they have about 25,000 words, easily enough, and that there are thousands of words for parts of the boats and sleds.

Taking the latter statement first, I confess that sounds incredible. White men have perhaps fifty. True the Eskimo is more interested in kyaks and sleds than we are in boats and sleds. But *thousands* of words! There are only a few dozen parts, many of them exact duplicates requiring no separate word. How can it be, then? Aren't you exaggerating just a little more than grossly? Or were the Eskimos I knew—ordinary fellows—far inferior to the super race you had in mind that refined so incredibly on "parts". They must have named each molecule of their boats and sleds.

Of course they have more than a few hundred words, if you include nouns and place names. I probably meant abstract terms like general parts of speech, adjectives and epithets in general. Their language struck me as rather primitive, though I am and have been a fan for Eskimos, as everyone knows who has seen my stories and articles. Of course, I don't know them very well, having only lived and worked with them (and painstakingly set down their vocabulary) for ten uninterrupted years. The Eskimos I knew were the northern Alaska fellows, around Kotzebue Sound, and hundreds of miles west and north of it. I was well aware that I was unable to get a lot of their words, my medium of communication whereby I was enabled to get what I did being confined to the English they knew and the Eskimo *I* knew. But as a result of many tests I convinced myself their language was not at all rich; and I see no reason why that fact couldn't be ascertained *a priori* from a consideration of the general facts about the Eskimos. Can it be that the other Innoits, especially the Eastern Arctic boys, are far in advance of my people? I doubt it, but I haven't the temerity to dispute a publication of the Smithsonian. But don't you recollect that the words were mostly nouns? Nouns, particularly place nouns are not real vocabulary in the sense in which I (if it was I) undoubtedly used the word. Barring nouns I would be willing to wager my Eskimo collection in the museum out here against your typewriter that you couldn't extract a thousand words out of any Alaskan Eskimo on a promise of a ship-load of gum drops (another pretty fiction of some Eskimo "authorities", like their religion, myths and the like, a lot of which I have read about but, like the fabled Fountain of Youth, have been unable to actually locate.)

I can say this, for whatever it may be worth in the matter: I got only a blank look from the brightest and best English speaking young Eskimo I knew when I asked him for the Eskimo equivalent of word after word of our language of meanings presumably within the compass of the Eskimo's psychology and experience. They didn't have them. Hence my inference of a limited vocabulary.—T. S. SOLOMONS.

THE CENTRAL character of T. S. Miller's story is a real person, according to Mr. Miller. You'll agree that this world needs more like him.

Berkeley, Calif.

Bill Roche is a real person. He was a visitor to my choproom at the Jebba station on the Upper Niger. *Roche* (which is not his true name) was a well-known character in Nigeria twenty years ago. Old *Adventure* readers will remember him in a former story—"The Grotesques of N'Gibbidi"—in which he turned down a fortune out of regard for an African's feelings. There are those who leave the stamp of their personalities on one's memory for all time, those to whom one looks back with a pleasurable sense, as of contacts with the simple and true. Of such was *Roche*. I will never forget his drawling voice, his naive philosophy—the philosophy of those who face the stern elemental; men of the great lonelinesses. He had acclimated the Africa's patience, and, perhaps, he was a bit contaminated by its fatalism. At first he gave you an idea of tremendous simplicity, but soon you were getting glimpses of dumb poetry and deep feeling. His sun-puckered blue eyes had an off-seeing look that reminded me of the line, "He set his face in solitary space twixt the wind and the open sky." His slow, drawling voice was full of question marks, as if he were asking what it is all about. He would hardly pass for respectable; was, in fact, something of a scandalous figure among us. We thought he lowered the prestige of the whites, but, as I hope this story shows, he had his own notions of that prestige and how it would be upheld. A thing he told me of himself give the key-note to the man. He had taken a home trip, after years of sun, fever, hunger, abortive adventures. At the Liverpool dock he was accosted by a slattern with an inviting smile. He turned right round and shipped back to Negroland, sick of his own people.—T. S. MILLER.

EPISODES in which a dead officer "led" his men to battle are, apparently, more than few. And, obviously, more than thrilling.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mr. Radmore cites historical precedent for the episode included in my story of last year, "The Figurehead," which episode was duplicated so completely in fact during the recent Moroccan fighting: A dead officer led forward by his men, to serve them as a flag. From French military history, it would be possible to bring forward a half dozen such incidents in various wars. But the fighting men of one nation seem quite like those of any other.

An historical precedent: Prince Windischgraetz commanded a regiment of Austrian Infantry at the battle of Solferino, during the War for Italian Freedom. His unit was attacking a farm-house, defended by French troopers, belonging to the Fifty-fifth of the Line, if I recall rightly. Windischgraetz was mortally wounded, but refused to be taken to the rear. He ordered that his corpse be taken forward "as a flag," to inspire his men to greater valor.

A precedent out of Arabic Tradition: Antar, the Arabs' Achilles, felt himself dying. He and his followers were being pursued by relentless foes. To give time to those he loved to escape, he asked to be hoisted into the saddle to die. The corpse, braced on the warrior's lance, guarded a mountain passage. The enemy halted at the sight of Antar and gave time to the rest to vanish.

In General Baron de Marbot's Memoirs, one can read that Napoleon wanted the soldiers in his regiments to consider their Colonel as a flag. On one occasion, the Emperor sent a regiment back into battle, to bring back the body of the leader, left behind in a first panic. And when it came to war traditions, Napoleon "knew his stuff."

Here is a case much like that described by Mr. Radmore as having occurred at Balaklava, during the Charge of the Light Brigade:

August 6th, 1870. The French are losing the battle of Froeschwiller. Had they won it, there would have been no World War, or at least, had there been, the nations would have divided differently.

To give his army time to escape, the French commander orders the heavy cavalry, the *Cuirassiers*, to charge. One by one, the glittering regiments gallop down the slopes and melt away under Prussian fire.

Comes the turn of the Third *Cuirassiers*. Colonel de Lacarre rises in his stirrups, raises his sword, and turns to his expectant men:

"Char—"

A shell beheads him, and the order is never finished. But the impulse has been given, and the Third goes forward, bullets striking on plates like hail on a tin roof, trampling the bodies of those who preceded them.

In the lead, fearsome apparition, gallops a headless rider, torso drenched in blood, sword waving with each leap of the powerful horse—

De Lacarre is leading his regiment—

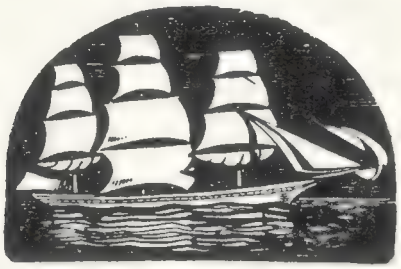
And, to conclude, another coincidence:

In 1925, Lieutenant de La Tour (mentioned by Mr. Radmore) is killed in Morocco, by Berbers. A few years before, another de La Tour, a sub-lieutenant, was killed by Tuareg north of Timbuktu. The Tuareg are also Berbers.

There's nothing new under the sun.—GEORGES SURDEZ.

HOW do you like our new cover? Or, rather, our "old" cover? So many of you told us that you preferred this sort of cover design for your magazine that we decided to go back to it—and here it is. Won't you tell us how you like it? And, while you're at it, how you like the "insides" of the magazine as well?—J. C.

ASK *Adventure*



For *free information* and *services* you can't get elsewhere

Aircraft

HERE'S an airplane that is practically a flying fortress: Not only may it be equipped with several machine-guns, but it will carry one or two light cannon and a heavy cargo of bombs.

Mechanicville, N. Y.

Request:—"Please send me information about the Barling Bomber, Douglas Cruiser, the Martin Bomber, and the P. M. 9. Please send me information about the armament of the Barling Bomber. I would like if you have them, pictures of each airplane named above."—PHILIP SAYE.

Reply, by Mr. W. G. Schauffler, Jr.:—It will be almost impossible for me to go into complete detail concerning these various planes, but I will do the best I can in a limited manner. I might say, I am giving you a thumbnail sketch of these various aeroplanes.

The initial flight of the Barling Bomber, conceded to be the largest aeroplane in the world today, occurred on August 22, 1923, at Wilbur Wright Field, thereby bringing three years of engineering effort to a successful culmination.

The contract for the NBL-1 aeroplane, popularly called the "Barling Bomber" after its designer, was awarded to the Witteman-Lewis Aircraft Company, incorporated, Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey, by the Engineering Division of the Air Service in June, 1920. A few months before the letting of this contract, the Engineering Division of the Air Service had engaged the services of Walter H. Barling, an English aircraft designer, for the purposes of making preliminary studies on a large night bombardment aeroplane. During his employment, a feasible design was originated which warranted the Air Service's calling for bids on construction of two experimental aeroplanes.

The construction of the Barling was completed at the contractor's plant in October, 1922, from whence the aeroplane was shipped to Wilbur Wright Field, where it remained in storage until the spring of 1923 Owing to its large size, considerable difficulty was experienced in furnishing transportation of the assembled unit, and in selecting a suitable field for the initial flight.

The first taxying tests of this aeroplane were made at Wilbur Wright Field by the Engineering Division on August 16, 1923, for the purpose of testing landing gear and operation of control. During these tests a take-off was made with nine persons aboard for short hops and straight-away flight. Three hops were made at a maximum altitude of 20 feet, the take-off being effected within a distance of 360 feet in just 14 seconds with wind velocity from 6 to 8 miles per hour. As a result of these tests several changes were found necessary in order to improve engine control and eliminate vibration of tail surfaces before undertaking actual flight.

The first flight lasting 28 minutes was made on August 22, 1923, to an altitude of 2,000 feet with a crew of four persons and 350 gallons of gasoline. The take-off was made in 14 seconds in a distance of 360 feet at an indicated air speed of 60 miles per hour. The aeroplane was found to balance in climbing, at full throttle, and with hands off controls, at an indicated air speed of 75 miles per hour with horizontal stabilizer setting of 22-2/13 degrees. Cooling of engines was found to be inadequate and some vibration was observed in tail surfaces which ceased as soon as tail was removed from slip-stream or in gliding which occurred at an indicated air speed of 93 miles per hour. A very smooth landing, due to excellent shock absorbing qualities of Oleo gear and to slow landing speed, was made in 31 seconds from time to contact to end of roll. The flying qualities of this aeroplane appear to be excellent, in so far as could be determined in this short flight. Perfect stability was apparent both laterally and longitudinally. Considerable effort was required to actuate

rudder control, as these surfaces appear to be too small. Response to elevator control is rather slow at reduced speed with throttle off, which is very likely due to size and weight of aeroplane rather than to inadequate elevator surface.

The Barling Bomber, Air Service designation NBL-1, is a large triplane with span of 120 feet, length 65 feet, and height 27 feet, designed for long distance night bombardment. It is powered by six Liberty engines, has a tail group larger than the wing surfaces of a D.H.-4 aeroplane, and weighs over 20 tons, six of which are carried as fuel. The Barling Bomber in trial tests has made a ground speed of over 100 miles an hour, and has a very rapid climb for such a large ship. Exact figures cannot be given concerning these matters, as they are military secrets.

In war time the Barling Bomber would be practicaly a flying fort, for it can be equipped with a great many machine-guns, one or two light cannon, and can carry a heavy load of bombs.

I am sorry that I can not furnish you with photographs of the Barling Bomber, but if you wish to obtain these, you can probably write to Underwood and Underwood, news photographers, and they will supply you at a reasonable cost. This applies also to the Martin Bomber and the Douglas World Cruisers.

The Martin Bomber is the plane which has been used by the United States Air Service during the past few years, for carrying heavy bombs. The battleships, *New Jersey* and *Virginia*, were sunk by bombs dropped from Martin Bombers. These bombs weighed anywhere from 800 to 2,000 pounds each. The sinking blows on both the *Virginia* and the *New Jersey*, were caused by 1,100 pound bombs, dropped from a Martin Bombing Plane. The specifications of the Martin Bomber are as follows: It can hold four people; a pilot, a navigator, a bomber and a gunner. It is equipped with two 400 horsepower Liberty motors containing 12 cylinders each. Its span is 71 feet 5 inches, length 46 feet 10 inches, height 14 feet 7 inches, upper chord 7 feet 10 inches, lower chord 7 feet 10 inches, upper incidence 2 degrees, lower incidence 2 degrees, gap 8 feet 4 inches, airfoil RAF-15, total area wing 1070. It weighs empty, 6,702 pounds, the fuel weighs 1,287 pounds, oil 128 pounds, armament and equipment 528 pounds, crew 540 pounds, and the gross weight is 9,185 pounds. The weight per square foot is 8.6. It is armed with machine-guns, and carries bombs in a bomb rack inside of the fuselage, and in some cases bomb racks are attached to the wings. This plane makes practically 100 to 110 miles per hour.

The characteristics of the Douglas World Cruisers have been published in several magazines, and I give them to you as follows: Overall span 50 feet, overall length 35 feet 2-½ inches, overall height 13 feet 17-¼ inches, span with wings folded 20 feet 2 inches, span of wings upper and lower same 50 feet, chord of wings upper and lower same 7 feet 6 inches, dihedral no degrees upper, 2 degrees lower, incidence 3 degrees upper, 3 degrees lower, gap 8 feet no inches, stagger none, sweepback none. The total surface including ailerons is 694 square feet, upper wing 308.5, lower wing 328, ailerons upper only, 57.5, elevator 34 square feet, fins 12.25 square feet, rudder 22.8 square feet, stabilizer 63 square feet. Weight (estimated) empty including water 4,268 pounds, useful load 4,559 pounds, crew 360 pounds, fuel 3,600 gallons, oil 375 gallons, extra water 54 gallons, equipment 140, total load 8,227 pounds, weight per square foot of supporting area 12.5 pounds, weight per horse power on Liberty Motor 420.21 pounds. Total load as seaplane 9,587 pounds. Performance (estimated) average cruising speed 80 miles per hour, endurance 27.5 hours, average fuel consumption 22 gallons per hour, range 2,200 miles.

The description of the P. N.-9 is as follows: 2 No. 1500 Packard Engines at 615 horse power each; Reconnaissance Flying Boat Type; total weight, about 15,000 pounds; dead load about 8,900 lb.; normal fuel capacity 489 gal. gas; wing areas including ailerons, 1,220 square feet; airfoil section USA 27; wing span, both upper and lower, 72 feet 10 inches; length overall, 49 feet 11-16 inches; height, 18 feet 1-¼ inches; chord, 9 feet; gap 9 feet 4 inches; angle of incidence, 2 degrees; live load, 8,500 pounds; ceiling, about 12,000 feet.

The Navy Department will not give out the dope on the ceiling and the rate of climb but state that the ceiling is in excess of the P. M.-7 which is 10,000 feet. The climb of the P. N.-7 with two 350 horse power Wright Motors is 4900 ft. in 10 minutes. The P. N.-9 has twice the power so the climb is increased and the ceiling increased materially. The P. N.-7 reaches its maximum ceiling in 32 minutes. The claims for live load in the P. N.-9 sounds to me to be a bit fishy, though they claim with the larger power plant, the live load capacity over the P. N.-7 is doubled or approximately doubled. The structural details of the P. N.-9 outside of the power plant are the same as the P. N.-7.

Insignia

"EVERYWHERE Justice and Glory Lead."

Request:—"The meaning of the following words: UBIQUE QUO FAS ET GLORIA DUCUNT?

A British Tommy gave me a small ornament with the first above word in blue enamel over a field artillery piece, and a crown above that. The other words are on the bottom of the ornament, in a blue enamel color. I value this little thing very much as the Tommy was bumped off the very day he got back to the front."—W. S. Britton, Creston, Ia.

Reply, by Mr. Lieut. Townsend:—The ornament which the British soldier gave you apparently is the badge of the British Royal Artillery. The significance of the crown and the field piece will be clear to you. Blue is the color of the Royal Artillery and the motto may be more or less literally translated as "Everywhere that Justice and Glory lead."

Copra

COCONUTS for this purpose are sold by the ton. One instance where man's artifice improves on the sun.

Request:—"What is copra, as is mentioned in one of the *Adventure* magazine stories?"—DOROTHY DANIELS, Los Gatos, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—Copra is the dried meat or kernel of the ripe coconut.

The price paid for copra is about $150 per ton "on the beach."

Fifteen hundred nuts average a ton.

Copra is one of the principal articles of export from the Pacific islands. It is valued especially for the oil it yields, which is used in the manufacture of candles, soap and other articles.

What remains after the oil has been removed from the dried kernel is called either "poonac" or "stearin" or "cake" (all three names are of the same thing according to local custom). This product of the hydraulic presses is used for fodder and manure, in much the same manner as cottonseed-oil cake is used.

Copra dried in the sun, or in a kiln, yields from 50 to 60 per cent. of oil, but when dried by hot air it yields as high as 74 per cent.

Thirty ordinary coconuts will yield enough copra to yield, in turn, one gallon of oil.

Bloodhounds

THIS seems to shatter an old American credo. The proverbial ferocity of this man-trailer is scouted.

Request:—"I am, and have been for years, a keen breeder and trainer of bloodhounds and am looking for 'fresh blood' from real man-trackers, which, if they are also big and inclined to be savage, will suit me all the better.

It has struck me that there must be some really practical breeders in your territory, and if you would be kind enough to give me an address or two of reputable men, or some little information about their hounds' capacity, I would be very much obliged."—W. SHOVELTON, Alberta, Canada.

Reply, by Mr. Horace Kephart:—The best bloodhounds that I know of, in our part of the country, are those of deputy Sheriff J. C. Roberts of West Asheville, N. C. They are of the same strain as "Old Joe," a famous bloodhound, now dead, that Sheriff Lyerly used to employ for man-trailing around here. I have seen Joe work at his job and he certainly was a good one, not fooled by turpentine or anything else used to throw him off the scent.

But these dogs are not all savage. I do not know any real bloodhounds that are. When they find their man they may rear up on him as a sign of identification, but they never bite or try to tear him down.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard small launch river and lake tripping and cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 5742 Stony Island Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Yachting BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash., or HENRY W. RUBINKAM, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating GEORGE W. SUTTON, 6 East 45th St., New York City.

Motor Camping JOHN D. LONG, 610 W. 16th St., New York City.

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Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure*.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign LIEUT. GLENN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 2200 Kinzie Ave., Racine, Wis.

U. S. Marine Corps LIEUT. P. W. HOPKINS, Fleet Marine Corps Reserves, Box 1042, Madford, Oregon.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., care *Adventure*.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, No. 2 Grace Court, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—THOMAS H. DAMERON, 911 S. Union Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley)," care *Adventure*.

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decoratice arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Museum of American Indians, 155th St. and Broadway, N. Y. City.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure*.

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.*—DR. G. K. NOBLE, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St. and Central Park West, New York, N. Y.

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.*—DR. FRANK E. LUTZ, Ramsey, N. J.

Ichthyology GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Ornithology PROF. ARCHIBALD RUTLEDGE, Mercersburg Academy, Mercersburg, Pa.

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The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (See next two sections.)—BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping.*—HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apartment 330-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*.

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure*.

The Sea Part 5 *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure*.

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean (Siberian Waters).*—CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure*.

Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

South Sea Islands JAMES STANLEY MEAGHER, 5316 Pine Street, Inglewood, Calif.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz.

Borneo CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*.

★**New Guinea** *Questions regarding the policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa.** TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania** PHILLIP NORMAN, 84 Military Rd., Mosman, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia.

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Europe Part 7 *Denmark.*—G. I. COLBRON, East Avenue, New Canaan, Conn.

Europe Part 8 *Holland.*—J. J. LEBLEU, 51 Benson St., Glen Ridge, N. J.

Europe Part 9 *Belgium and Luxemburg.*—J. D. NEWTON, 4 rue des Toxandres, Etterbeek, Brussels, Belgium.

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Europe Part 12 *Spain.*—J. D. NEWSOM, 4 rue des Toxandres, Etterbeek, Brussels, Belgium.

South America Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure.*

South America Part 2 *Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil.*—PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, 21 Claremont Ave., New York, N. Y.

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Central America *Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif.

Mexico Part 1 *Northern. Border States of old Mexico Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Mexico Part 2 *Southern, Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan.*—C. R. MAHAFFEY, 236 Fox Ave., San José, Calif.

Mexico Part 3 *Southeastern. Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and states of Yucatan and Campeche.* Also archeology.—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Popular Ave., Takoma Park, Md.

Newfoundland.—C. T. JAMES, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Greenland Also dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Canada Part 1 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.* Also homesteading.—FRED L. BOWDEN, 5 Howard Avenue, Binghamton, New York.

✠**Canada Part 2** *Southeastern Quebec.* JAS. F. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 3** *Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin.* Also Indian life and habits: Hudson's Bay Co. posts. No questions answered on trapping for profit.—S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), Box 393, Ottawa, Canada.

✠**Canada Part 4** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 5** *Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario.* Also national parks.—A. D. ROBINSON, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada.

Canada Part 6 *Hunters Island and English River District.*—T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn.

Canada Part 7 *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.* Also yachting.—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C.

Canada Part 8 *The Northw. Ter. and the Arctic, especially Ellesmere Land, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland and the half-explored islands west of Ellesmere.*—PATRICK LEE, Tudor Hall, Elmhurst, Long Island.

Alaska. Also mountain work.—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 1427 Lareta Terrace, Los Angeles, Calif.

Western U. S. Part 1 *Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.*—E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif.

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Western U. S. Part 3 *Colo. and Wyo.*—FRANK EARNEST, Sugar Loaf, Colo.

Western U. S. Part 4 *Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.*— FRED W. EGELSTON, 1029 Litch Court, Reno, Nev.

Western U. S. Part 5 *Idaho and Surrounding Country.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Western U. S. Part 6 *Tex. and Okla.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S. Part 1 *The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.* Especially early history of Missouri Valley.—JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 2 *Mo. and Ark. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Especially wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 3 *Ind., Ill., Mich., Minn., and Lake Michigan.* Also clamming, natural history, legends.—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

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Middle Western U. S. Part 5 *Lower Mississippi River. (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

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Eastern U. S. Part 2 *Western Maine. For all territory west of the Penobscot River.*—DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 3 *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I. and Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, P. O. Box 1332, New Haven, Conn.

Eastern U. S. Part 4 *Adirondacks, New York.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S. Part 5 *Maryland and District of Columbia.* Also historical places.—LAWRENCE EDMUND ALLEN, 1505 C St. S. E., Washington, D. C.

Eastern U. S. Part 6 *Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard.* Also sawmilling, saws.—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care *Adventure.*

Eastern U. S. Part 7 *Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia.*—PAUL M. FINE, Jonesboro, Tenn.

BOOKS *you can* Believe

JUNGLE PATHS AND INCA RUINS: by Wm. M. McGovern, The Century Co., New York and London, 1927. A good book. Bill has a distinct sense of humor. He made me laugh more than once and I do not laugh easily at jokes in South American travel books. More often I feel like crying. He avoided the beaten track by cutting a wide arc into the real unknown. He tried everything he saw the Indians doing. He stalled on eating lice but got away with the caterpillars. I couldn't even eat caterpillars. Too hairy and stringy. All in all he had a good time and he tells about it in a racy style that makes easy reading. Also it is a relief to find at least one Englishman who hides no barbs for American readers to take offense at. I recently finished reading two huge volumes of South American exploration whose writer, an Englishman, had his entire trip spoiled by meeting a coarse, uncultured Yankee on the boat after he arrived on the west coast. He had been through enough without that final test to his nerves. Doc McGovern has no grouch against us. In return here is at least one Yankee who has none against him. Such books make for friendship. His story is the real thing. If there is any fiction in it it is so well done that even I can't find it. I take pleasure in officially approving and recommending this book of real adventure—EDGAR YOUNG.

LOG OF A TIMBER CRUISER (The). Author, Wm. Pinkey Lawson. Published by Duffield & Co., 200 Madison Ave., N. Y. City. 214 pages. 29 Chapters. Glossary of terms. Ought to have index in future editions. 51 illustrations—fine photographic. A detailed, appreciative, humorous and accurate account of day-to-day incident and a broad view of Government Forest Guard, Ranger, National Reserve toil and exploration, estimating and experience. The kind of a book a Western region specialist, student, writer, observer buys on sight for his working library. "I have heard much of reconnaissance," Lawson writes (he was Forest Guard), "the cruising of timbered areas and the topographical mapping of regions usually wild and mountainous, often unsurveyed and well nigh inaccessible. . . . work was the most trying, physically, of any in the Forest Service; that only the hardiest might hope to successfully undergo the ordeal . . . brush-covered hills, across malpais-strewn mesas, through tangled thickets of woven thorns and fallen aspen, over jutting peaks." A hero tale of faithful, honest, competent service by good men with consciences in the service of their country. Facts of Arizona Black Range work, checked through by Gifford Pinchot and Forest Service associates of author to make sure of accuracy. A re-issue.—RAYMOND S. SPEARS.

Lost Trails

All inquiries of this sort received by us, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with the inquirer's name. We reserve the right, in case the inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any number or other name, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and in general to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Except relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

ALLEN, GEORGE (E. J. A.) Please communicate with relatives, care *Adventure.*

CLIFFORD, ROBERT—Last heard of in 1915 at South Indian, Ont., Canada. Please write HAROLD WILLIS, 204½ N. Main Street, Blackwell, Okla. Do you still remember the "Lone-Scout" days when I wrote you from Collinsville, Box 483, Okla.

FLANNAGAN, IRL, R. U. S. S. *Dent* and *Mullaney* 1920—1922. RICHARD C. FULLER, care *Adventure.*

DANIELS, HARRY RODGER—6 feet tall, weighs 185 lbs., tattooed both arms, chest and back, wife's name on left arm under Indian head. Was a Sergeant Major in the 7th Cav., during the Spanish-American War, was a sailor prior to that. With the first division during the late war. Gassed and wounded. Hasn't been heard from since 1921. Was working out of Pendleton, Oregon, in 1926. Is a granite and marble cutter by trade. Please write his niece—HAZEL DANIELS, care *Adventure.*

DODD, E. A.—Formerly employed by the Herald Publishing Co., of Montreal, communicate to advantage with MR. CAMPBELL, Box 385, Montreal, Canada.

TRACY, GEORGE (SKEE)—Formerly of the S.S. *Vacuum.* Please write to your old friend.—BLINK SEIBERT, care *Adventure.*

HICKS, WILLIAM HERSCHELL—Last heard from in Venice, Calif., was working in shipyards there in 1921. Age 26, light hair, blue eyes.—Sister, MRS. W. B. MEACHAM, 307 Farmer St., Vicksburg, Miss.

PETERSON, FREDERICK E. (called Pete by his friends)—Last heard from at 315 N. Front Street, Camden, N. J., July 19, 1926. Age 19 years, blond, blue eyes, 6 feet tall.—MOTHER, 625 West Locust Street, Belvidere, Ill.

KLUEBER, ROBERT H.—Left home in 1913. Last heard from at Los Angeles in 1915. 28 years of age, tall and fair, blond hair, brown eyes. Very fond of Western life and hoboing. Have worried about him ever since he left and would be very happy to find him. Mother—MRS. IDA M. SMITH, 1022 N. Vandeveter Avenue, St. Louis, Mo.

RAY, W. T. or BILLY—Sometimes known as Walter Ray. Write your nephew Ray Smith, Merrill Route, Klamath Falls, Oregon. Important news. Private.

COLLINS, LEN—Last heard from care Reading Coal Mines, Kimmelton, Pa., Nov. 15, 1925. Brother Frank would appreciate a communication from any one knowing his whereabouts.

WELCH, GEORGE WILLIAM—Brother Laurie inquires. Would he communicate—Quite O. K. "SAM FELIX," care 65 Broadway, New York City. (Oil Tank)

"Old Songs that Men have Sung," appears in alternate issues.

The Trail *Ahead*

The next issue of ADVENTURE, *out August 15th*

Three *Complete Novelettes:*

The Guest of Karadak

By Harold Lamb

To the citadel of the *Lord of Iran*, over the yellow desert wastes, traveled *Kurran*, the lone prince. His dress was that of a pilgrim, his face that of a man of peace. Yet twice in the course of his journey, his eyes lingered on the infamies of the desert raider *Mirakhon Pasha;* and *Kurran's* eyes were not those of a man who soon forgets.

Brown Sees Rio

By Norman Springer

Brown joined the Navy to see the world; hence he was surprized and not a little annoyed that his two buddies of the engine-room, both old-timers in the Service, showed not the slightest interest in travel, or in much else, for that matter. Till one eventful day aboard came *Warrant Officer Slade*, with an old grudge and a new taste for little plaster Brazilian saints; and then *Brown's* hardboiled friends became excited for once.

Men Make Mistakes

By H. Bedford-Jones

A dying Chinese sailor wrote upon the wall that *Wang Shui* the pirate was aboard *Captain Howell's* smuggling ship. The supercargo said, "This little tinpot ship has no secrets. He can't be here." Many things, however, proved possible between Port Balik and Hilong Bay.

And—*Other Good Stories*

Part Two of The Devil's Castle, *a treasure hunt up the Orinoco*, by Arthur O. Friel; The Kink, *an airman too old to fly*, by Thomson Burtis; Good Medicine, *honor for the red man*, by Harry G. Huse; Power, *men of sail and men of steam*, by Robert Carse; The Killer, *beyond the law of the cattle trails;* The Road Winds Uphill, *the Bowery Missioner who steered a man*, by Edward L. McKenna.

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